Family Comes From Many Places

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/52779382.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Fandoms:	Sonic the Hedgehog (Live Action Movies), Sonic the Hedgehog - All Media Types
Characters:	Sonic the Hedgehog, Knuckles the Echidna, Miles "Tails" Prower, Mephiles the Dark, Original Sonic the Hedgehog Character(s), Maddie Wachowski, Tom Wachowski, Silver the Hedgehog, Blaze the Cat, Shadow the Hedgehog, Rouge the Bat, Biolizard (Sonic the Hedgehog), Original Characters
Additional Tags:	Found Family, Holidays, Brothers, Sibling Love, Dysfunctional Family, Other Additional Tags to Be Added
Language:	English
Series:	Part 6 of Little Hands, Big Attitude
Stats:	Published: 2024-01-03 Updated: 2024-09-20 Words: 22,386 Chapters: 11/?

Family Comes From Many Places

by Burningstars98

Summary

Shadow is hiding, Allison's parents are visiting, and things are getting a little weird in the town of Green Hills. Also, why does Sonic feel like someone's watching him...?

Chapter 1: Allow Me to Introduce- What Are YOU Doing Here!?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Telling herself that everything was going to be fine didn't stop Allison from worrying.

She'd overlooked the house multiple times, checked for any stray toys or knickknacks that had been left on the floor, scrubbed the bathrooms until they sparkled, and was considering washing the curtains at this point, and that had all been before she left the house this morning for work.

After all, this wasn't just the first time her parents would be meeting the kids, it was the first time they'd been back to Green Hills- to *this house*- since they'd moved away three years before for her dad to accept a position in a Chicago hospital. This house had been *their* house, and their daughter was determined to make sure they knew she was taking good care of it.

"Miss Allison? We are ready!"

The woman paused in her fretting over the house to focus on the children as Silver called out from the hallway. "Alright, lemme look at you."

Both of the children came out into the living room, standing apart to let her get a good look. Silver had put on a pair of jeans and a medium gray sweater, while Blaze had put on her favorite magenta dress, white tights and black Mary-Jane shoes, her hair pulled back in a high ponytail.

"Alright, room's clean, fresh clothes and both of you took showers while I was gone?"

Silver and Blaze both nodded, "And we took turns combing each other's fur to make sure there were no tangles." Silver announced, "Do we look acceptable to meet your parents?"

"Oh, you two...!" She bent down, wrapping her arms around them and breathing in the sweet scent of the soap still lingering on them from their showers. "You both look fantastic! Now, you remember the rules? You let me take the reins and I will let you two come in and meet them once we're all settled?"

"Yes, Miss Allison." Blaze replied, straightening her dress' skirt and untwisting her sleeves. "We will await your word."

"Good-"
She looked up as she heard a car horn, and went to the window, "Ope! There they are...! Why don't you two go sit in your room for a few minutes? I'll let you know when we're ready."

Both of the children nodded and then hurried down the hallway, while Allison checked her own appearance quickly in the mirror, and then slipped on her coat and headed out onto the

front porch. "Hey, guys...!"

"Hi, Baby Girl...!"
Mrs. Riley climbed out of the passenger seat, shuffling carefully around the car to give her daughter a hug as Allison navigated the walkway. "Oh my goodness, you look amazing! You cut your hair!"

"Thanks, Mom, and I did. How was the drive? I hope the snow wasn't too much trouble."

"We lived in Montana for forty-five years, Baby Girl..." Dr. Riley climbed out of the driver's seat and also embraced his daughter, "I think we know how to navigate a little snow. Lots of it this *early*, though."

"Yes, if this keeps up, Santa won't be able to find the houses come Christmas!"

The man chuckled, looking up at the house. "I see you've gotten some work done on the ol' girl. Fresh paint and you fixed the porch light-"

"Yeah. Finally got around to getting that done. Sheriff was able to help out with the paint scraping or I'd *still* be getting that old stuff off-"
She paused as she heard a third door open, looking behind her parents as the back door swung out and then a third passenger climbed out, barely even looking at her. "...*Opal... Hi.*"

Her older sister shoved her hands into the pockets of her coat, her brown curls dangling in her face. "Hey."

Allison gave a quick wave and then looked to her parents as her voice dropped through slightly clenched teeth, "Might've been nice to know *she* was coming *too,* guys..."

"I'm sorry it's so sudden, but she's got nowhere else to go right now and it didn't feel right to leave her at the house all by herself for the holidays..." Mrs. Riley apologized, "I hope it won't be a problem."

Allison took in a deep breath and shook her head with a forced smile, "No, it's fine. One extra guest won't change things. I'll help you get your stuff out of the car and inside, it's *freezing* out here!"

She walked around to the back of the car, pulling free the suitcases and then carefully handing them to their respective owners. She held out Opal's suitcase, the other woman just looking back and forth between it and Allison. "Opal. I'm your host, but you can at least carry your own luggage."

"But you're already doing such a good job...!"

"Opal, please." Dr. Riley scolded gently, "Be nice to your sister."

Opal sighed, taking the bag and following her parents up the walk. "So what, we all in the bedrooms?"

"Well, *you're* probably gonna have to sleep on the *couch*. I wasn't expecting you. Mom and Dad are in your old room and *my* old room's being used by the kids."

"What kids?"

"Mom and Dad *did* tell you I was fostering a little boy and girl, didn't they?"

"We did." Dr. Riley announced as he reached the front porch, "Looks like she didn't believe us."

"So I get to spend the holiday with two little brats. Brilliant."

"Well, they're already proving to be more polite than *you* today."
Allison opened the front door and allowed the trio inside, stomping snow from her shoes before stepping back in and switching them for her house shoes. "It's not a whole lot different in here, just a few new furnishings- Oh! And I had to replace the dishwasher, but Charlie was willing to give me a discount on that one."

"It's lovely, Allison." Mrs. Riley hugged her youngest daughter again, "Are the kids here right now? I'd love to meet them! The little girl sounded so sweet on the phone."

Allison grinned, "Yeah, she's a sweetheart... and her big brother's such a good helper around the house. I asked them to wait a few minutes until we got you guys settled a bit, they do better meeting new people in a calm setting, but they are both very excited to meet you... Why don't you guys set your stuff down in the back room, and I'll get some coffee going?"

"You drink coffee now?"

"No, but I know *you two do*."
She walked into the kitchen as her parents headed for the back of the house, and began opening the cabinet to collect the small package of coffee grounds she'd bought.

"Shoving Ma and Pops to the back corner, huh?"

Opal's voice came from right behind Allison, and she didn't even turn to face her. "Oh don't worry, I got rid of the smell of your *cigarette smoke.*" She caught the cabinet door to keep it from slamming, "It's just the guest room now."

"Hmph. Just took over the place, didn't you?"

"It's my house now, Opal. I can do what I want with it." She pulled the scrunchie from her wrist with her teeth and tied her hair back, "You're just upset they sold it to *me* and not you."

"I'm the oldest! It *should* have gone to me!"

"Well maybe it would have if you hadn't run off with... whatever his name was. It's been too long and I didn't care to remember. But since it *is* my house, you gotta play by *my* rules... So get out of my bubble, please."

The two women silenced again as their parents returned to the front room, Opal stepping back and leaning back against the counter with her arms crossed.

"Alrighty then!" Allison announced, putting her smile back on as she clapped her hands together. "Coffee's going... Now, before I introduce you to the kids, I want to go over a few things. Before they wound up with me, they were in a bit of a bad situation, so please, be patient with them? Camera phones need to be kept inactive for now too, they don't like having their pictures taken."
Allison took a deep breath, "...Silver and Blaze are special. *Very special*. I want this to go as smoothly as I can, you know?"

"Oh sweetie, you're worrying. We already love them, you know that."

"I know you do..." She gave a slight, uncertain glance to Opal, and then nodded. "Okay, just wait a second, I'll go let them know they can come out."
She walked down the hall, knocking softly on the door. "It's me."

The door opened a peek, and Silver's eye appeared in the crack. "Are we good to come out yet?"

"Yes, but I have to tell you something. My sister's here too, and I wasn't *expecting* her, so she might freak out a little. Just be patient and kind to her, okay?"

Silver nodded, and then opened the door all the way. He led the way, gripping Blaze's hand with one and Allison's with the other. "Lead the way."

"Good..."
Allison walked to the edge of the hallway, still keeping them out of sight as she peered around. "You guys ready?"

"Of course." Dr. Riley teased.

"Okay... Go ahead kids."

Silver hesitantly released Allison's hand, and then peeked around the corner first. Allison kept a close eye on her parents, but especially on Opal. Opal wasn't even really looking in their direction, but Allison's parents' eyes widened, sitting up a little bit straighter.

"H-Hello, Dr. Riley. Mrs. Riley." Silver greeted, "I am Silver, and this is my sister, Blaze."

Blaze gave a curtsy, "A pleasure to finally meet you both. Miss Allison speaks of you both highly-"

It was then that Opal actually focused on the pair, and Allison wrapped her arms around the pair in defense as she shrieked and jumped up onto the couch. "*Oh my god!*"

"*Shhh...!*" Allison hissed, "What did I just say about a *calm setting*-"

"What the hell *are* they!? Mutant rats!?"

"Hedgehog, actually." Silver corrected, not sounding at all offended by the insult. "And Blaze is a cat."

"Opal, calm down." Dr. Riley stood up, offering a hand to his eldest daughter, who refused it and remained in the corner.

"It is quite alright, Miss Opal." Blaze reassured, hands folded in front of her. "Silver and I mean you and your family no harm."

Mrs. Riley smiled, getting up and walking over to the cat. "Oh, of course you don't, precious...! How could a little girl as gorgeous as you mean any harm?"

"Mom! Don't *touch* it!"

Allison rolled her eyes, "Opal, get off the couch. *It's fine*."

"Why do you have mutants in your house!?"

"They're not *mutants*, Opal." Allison wrapped her arms around the pair again, "They're aliens who needed someone to look after them, that's all."

Opal fiddled with her back pocket, clearly trying to grab her phone, only to find it had tumbled across the floor when she'd jumped up. "Dad, call the cops or something!"

"No, no I don't think I will." Dr. Riley announced, arms crossed. "It would be rude to call Thomas in when there's really no trouble."

"Are you *crazy*!?"

"Opal, calling Sheriff Wachowski won't even make a difference. He already *knows* these two are here."

"What!? And he hasn't called in a SWAT team!?"

"I see what you meant about your sister being unsettled by us, Miss Allison." Silver murmured, "Is there any way we can *help*?"

"Ah, don't worry about it, Silver. She'll chill out when she wants to." Allison stood up and headed for the kitchen as the coffee machine beeped, "Ah, the coffee's done."

The two children followed her and her parents into the kitchen, Dr. Riley picking up Opal's phone and putting it in his own pocket with a chuckle. "I *am* curious how this happened though, Baby Girl."

"Our home was devastated by an environmental disaster," Silver informed, "Blaze and I had to flee to survive the aftermath. We arrived here using what we *believe* was a warp ring, but when I fell seriously ill, Blaze went to Miss Allison for help."

"Couldn't exactly send them back out into the snow, so here we are." Allison handed each of her parents a mug, and then pulled juice boxes out of the fridge for the younger pair, who

gave her quiet *'thank yous'* in return.

"How many people know they're here?"

"Oh, the whole town. Everyone's been pretty chill about it."

"Yes," Blaze informed, "Green Hills has been quite hospitable to us since we arrived. Though that may be due to their familiarity with Sheriff Wachowski's *sons*."

Allison smiled, "Yeah, you know how Old Carl used to go on and on about-"

"His Blue Devil out in the woods?" Mrs. Riley nodded with a humored roll of her eyes, "Yes, we remember."

"Well, it turned out he was *right*. There was another young hedgehog, like Silver here, who had come here when he was just a toddler and lived out in the woods until about a year or so ago. Maddie and Tom took him in, plus three more boys that arrived a short time ago."

"The poor thing was out there all by himself for that long? He must've been so *scared*!"

Allison shrugged, "He warmed up to them real quick, and because of that, he was able to get his brothers settled in quick too."

"We visit their home to fellowship with them on a regular basis," Blaze explained, "Though it *can* become quite rowdy very quickly. I usually help Miss Maddie with watching their youngest, as he *is* still a baby."

They turned as they heard a creaking, and saw Opal carefully climbing down from the couch, still keeping a close eye on the two. "You stay on your side of the room, I'll stay on mine...!"

Silver shrugged, "If it makes you feel more comfortable with us, Miss Opal."

"So I am going to guess that all of this was the cause of Thomas' face appearing all over the news several months ago. Domestic terrorist? I think not."

"Yes. Some governmental agents came here after finding out about Sonic and tried to capture him, and knowing that Tom was the protector of the town, he fled to him for help. They kind of got tangled up in it for a few days before it was resolved... *Mostly*."

"So even government officials are in on this."

"Yes, though at this point, I'm not sure they really know what to *do* about it. You know how they can be. They want the kids under their constant supervision, but the town's already pack-bonded with them and ain't letting them go without a fight. The *current* compromise is to have an agent stationed here in town to keep an eye on them."

"And?"

Allison shrugged, "He seems harmless enough... I'm keepin' an eye on him, though."

"If he were to attempt to harm us, I have no doubts we all could depend on each other to protect each other." Blaze remarked.

"So then..." Mrs. Riley bent down to Blaze's level, "Are you the only little girl here? Your brother and Thomas' boys the only others here?"

"Oh no, there is also Rouge and Kaia. Rouge came here a few days ago, but I think she is having trouble getting comfortable with people being kind to her. Kaia is the oldest of us here and is very nice, but she is currently in hibernation, so I cannot speak with her." The cat adjusted her skirt, "But it is alright. I have Silver, and he is very special to me."

Allison smiled as she watched her mom bond with the little girl, and then turned to Opal as she settled down at the kitchen table, still watching the pair. "They really won't hurt you, you know."

"We'll see..."

Silver clasped his hands in front of him, "Miss Allison has requested the two of us be on our best behavior, and that is not particularly difficult for the two of us."

"Nope!" Allison put a hand on his back, "Nowhere near as much trouble as *Sonic*."

Silver grinned, "*Nowhere* near as much...If I am honest, much of the trouble I have gotten into has been due to Sonic's antics."

"Mrs. Riley," Blaze offered, "Would you be interested in seeing the paintings I've been working on?"

"Oh precious, I would be delighted to see your work!"

Blaze grinned, and then led the woman out of the kitchen, Silver following them down the hall.

"Allison..."
Allison turned to her dad as he spoke, "...There's something else, isn't there?"

"Not yet, Dad. I'll talk about it when the kids are in bed. It's a grown-up discussion."

Dr. Riley nodded, putting his coffee cup down and turning to Opal. "Want a cup of coffee too, Opal?"

"No thank you. I need to keep my wits about me."

Allison rolled her eyes, "They're not any different in how they behave than any other pair of kids, Opal. They play, they sleep, they learn. They just... have a bit more fur than we do."

"You realize how crazy you sound? You have aliens in your house, and are just okay with it! Do you have any idea what kinds of alien parasites that they brought in here?"

"Maddie and I made sure to vaccinate them and they bathe practically every day."

"I'm serious!"

"So am I!"

"Girls, please keep the volume down." Dr. Riley warned, "I know this is a bit of a struggle for you, but please... try to get along for a little bit?"

"Trying, Dad." Allison sighed, arms crossed. "Trying..."

Chapter End Notes

Hey, did you know you can put your story parts in on AO3 and retain all of the *italics* and **bold** without having to put it all back in yourself? Cuz I didn't until a few days ago, and I've been on this site for three years XD

Anyways, we're back!

Chapter 2: Prep the Halls

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Naptime was disrupted by a hard thump and a weight smacking down on me.

My eyes snapped open and I searched for the source of the attack, only to find it was the hard, thumping tail of a particular canine dangling off the foot of my parents' bed and smacking the cradle as it wagged. He was dreaming again, why he felt the need to antagonize me in the process, I may never know.

"Ah-zeee...!" I hissed, nudging the tail away from me only for it to came down again. The thought passed through my head to bite it, but honestly, there were probably fleas under that fur and I'd rather not get those in my mouth. "Ah-zee!"

The thumping paused and the tail retracted back. I sat up, brushing his fur from my own before looking up at the slobbery face peering down at me from the bed. "You are wateen on edsells." I warned him. He just looked back at me with that dopey gaze of his, my warning going in one ear and out the other- or perhaps just bouncing off of his skull like a flying rubber band.

The door to the room opened, and my frustration with the dog was replaced by the warmth I got from my mom's smile of greeting. "Mama!"

"Did you have a good nap, Obbie...?" She cooed as she picked me up, carrying me from the room and away from the fluff-monster still stationed on the bed.

Life had been a whirlwind ever since I arrived here. Born into this world under uncertain circumstances and taken in by a pair of humans who seemed drawn to tiny, furry alien adolescents found in the woods, I had quickly become the *obvious favorite* of the household, consisting of my new parents, the dog, and my three older brothers who had managed to kill me in another lifetime.

Well, technically I also killed one of *them*, but we're not discussing that at this time.

But despite my new, loving family and the entire town of Green Hills adoring us, the government was not too pleased with our presence here and was determined to have us all locked up, a statement that was more familiar to me than the theme music to Mario Kart coming from the living room, which it currently was, as was the sound of two of my brothers bickering over it.

Just a few short weeks ago, there had been a... *mishap*. A group of agents had entered the house and gotten pretty agitated upon seeing me. Things were said, actions made, and I accidentally sent everyone in the household into various fragments of reality, visions of places and times throughout time and space when humans had continued to threaten us or try to lock us up.

Trauma's a snitch, or something of that nature.

It was through my family that I was able to pull myself together again and release everyone, but it left us all a little rattled by what we'd seen... and that was *before* Shadow and Rouge arrived at our front door.

As we entered the living room, my eyes fell on the two in question. Rouge was reclined in one of the armchairs, having traded out the dark, skin-tight outfit she'd been wearing at first for loose sweat pants and sweatshirt to keep her warm. She'd evidently fallen into hibernation from cold and hunger when my brothers found her, and then tried to leave shortly after, but was convinced to at least stay until spring, when things warmed up.

What we were going to *do* with her for three months, I did not know.

Shadow on the other hand, was much more settled. Presently nestled in the corner of the living room in a nest made of blankets and pillows, he was watching my brothers play video games, but took his eyes off of the screen to wave at me as we approached.

I had to admit, the difference between the Shadow I'd known in my previous life and this one was *staggering*. The one before had been angry, destructive, too enveloped in his own rage and desire to somehow make up for losing Maria to even see the opportunity to be something other than a tool for revenge.

This Shadow was- well, to put it honestly- afraid of his own shadow. Skittish but friendly, nervous but trying his best to be optimistic and trying his *very best* to branch out into something other than the title of *'Ultimate Lifeform'* he'd been given. Once the government agents left or at least decided he wasn't worth chasing, I had no doubt he would get the confidence to make himself whatever he wanted to be, and so far, his goal was just to *'Be Good.'*

Good for him. I'd learned myself that aspiring to be a god is overrated.

"Hello, Obsidian." Shadow greeted with a smile, "Did you sleep well?"

I just blew bubbles at him- I needed to keep up my innocent, oblivious act up to keep suspicion away from me from my parents and siblings. Knuckles was already in on it, but even *he* had no idea how smart and understanding I was, not that I could really express it. Having the mind of an adult didn't not mean I wasn't still physically a baby.

"Good." Shadow replied, snuggling a bit more into his nest of pillows and wincing a bit.

I knew what was bothering him- it was his leg. He'd barely been able to walk on it for more than a few steps ever since he and Rouge had arrived here, thanks to bullet shrapnel being caught up in it. His leg had healed over the entry wounds, but the foreign material was still there, causing him pain and possible infection.

I'd heard my mom and dad talking about it late the other night, unaware that I understood what they were discussing. Amputation, they said? Was it really that serious? I wished I

could do something about it, the last thing that should happen is for him to lose his leg from this...

"Are Grandma and Grandpa really coming to our house for Thanksgiving?" Tails asked excitedly, "Where are they gonna sleep?"

Mom bent down to the fox and kissed his forehead, "They are, and they'll be staying at the hotel."

"I can't wait!" Sonic announced, though his smile fading quickly. "It's too bad Rachel decided not to come. It would've been the first time I've seen Jojo since..." He gave a wince, "...Well, *you know*."

Mom *did* know, but *I* didn't. Though I knew that there had been events preluding my arrival to the family that involved the government and Tails and Knuckles' own arrival, they'd never actually sat me down and explained what happened. Of course, that was because most of them wouldn't believe I'd understand.

"Your aunt needs time... Hawaii was a lot for her and I don't blame her for wanting some space."

Tails' namesakes wrapped around his body as he seemed to shrink, his face turning down into a sad frown. "Yeah... We made a mess of things."

"Oh sweetheart..."
Mom bent down to the fox and rubbed his back, "What happened wasn't your fault... *You* were *unconscious* for most of it."

"Well yeah, but your sister's wedding was ruined because of us."

"It was a set-up!" Sonic reminded, "That Randall guy was only with her to lure me out into the open and get Mom and Dad arrested!"

"We cannot change what happened that day," Knuckles hummed, "Only move forward and hope that Mother's sister chooses to accept us someday."

"You sure this is a good idea...?" Rouge mumbled from the recliner, her eyes closed and arms tucked under her head. "...So many people here all at once with 'Pickle and I here?"

"Don't call me that." Shadow grumbled, sinking deeper into his pillow pile. "...She has a point, though."

"It'll be fine."
Mom smiled, though it was one of those half-confident smiles that masked her own concerns. She could say it would be fine as much as she wanted, but there were some things- some strands of fate out of her control- that might still bring trouble.

The strands of Chaos seemed attracted to this family... My brothers especially.

"What about *your* parents, Miss Maddie?" Shadow asked.

"They live too far out to come, but they always call on holidays to say hello."

"Do they know about... All of *us*?"

"Well... I mean-"

"That means no." Rouge grumbled, stretching for a moment before getting up from the chair and moving towards the kitchen. "We're Green Hills' big secret that could shatter the internet in an instant if it found out..."

"Do you *need* anything Rouge, or are you going to raid the fridge again like you did at three AM?" Shadow asked.

"Oh, so it *wasn't* a nightmare." Sonic sighed, "I come downstairs for a bottle of water to *glowing eyes peering out of a foggy, white haze...*"

"And *me*-" Shadow nestled deep into his nest, "-shoving my head into the pillows to keep from laughing so loud it wakes the neighbors."

Rouge rolled her eyes, pulling a package of ramen noodles out of the cabinet. "I can make my own ramen, thanks."

Oh, to be able to speak proper. To be able to remind her that *that* wasn't the question. As different as Rouge and Shadow were from the ones I once knew, her ways of just taking what she needed- or *wanted*- without asking remained. It was drilled into her from young age, the spirit that you must take what you need for yourself because no one will give it to you if you ask.

Mom followed her into the kitchen, "Rouge, I have no problem with sharing our food, but it would be nice if you asked first."

The bat's ears folded back a bit, "Sorry... Habit."

"I know, it's hard to go from having to fend for yourself to having people wanting to provide for you, but habits like that can be broken..."

The bat didn't speak again, unwrapping the rectangle of noodles and putting them in a large measuring cup before filling it with water and putting it in the microwave.

"As I was saying..." Mom adjusted her grip on me, "My parents were at Rachel's wedding in Hawaii, so they're aware of Sonic and Tails, but we haven't had time to *properly* do an introduction."

Knuckles gave a firm nod to the group as a whole, "We must trust that this holiday will not be disrupted by danger. However, if it is to be threatened, I have faith we will be able to handle what comes our way."

Knuckles, your eloquence of language is what I strive for...

Sonic sighed, "It's too bad Kaia's not able to celebrate with us. She's trapped under all that ice."

"Hibernation might be good for her." Tails suggested, "I read a bit on chao and their life cycles once and it said that periods of inactivity are normal, and they always come back out of them stronger."

"Indeed..." Knuckles hummed, "Perhaps some deep meditation will be good for her... She *is* keeping Shadow hidden from the government's radars."

"You're sure it's *her* doing that?" Rouge asked.

"Who *else* has the ability and kindness to forge such a large shield?"

None of my family or our guests had an argument to that, even if Kaia wasn't here herself to confirm or deny. But that wasn't what was concerning me about recent events...

...Shadow *remembered* falling from the Ark and Sonic going super to catch him. That hadn't happened here, or at least it hadn't *yet*. I supposed there was the chance that in the future, Sonic would be sent back in time and make that a historical event- time was like that, folding in and out of itself like origami- but if so, Shadow shouldn't yet be able to *remember* it.

I certainly hadn't projected events from alternate realities into the hedgehog's head, but then... Who *did*?

"Obbie's doing it again."
I looked up as Sonic spoke, seeing my brothers all looking at me. "That concentrated face. You trying to poop there, Obbie?"

No, Sonic. I am trying to unravel the mysteries of the universe and beyond.

"Well, if we're gonna get this place all ready for the holiday, we'd better get to cleaning up! Finish up that round and then I want you boys to clean your room upstairs."

"Aww Mom...! Who's gonna look at our room?"

"Your grandma will be peeking, I guarantee it."

Knuckles gave a nod to our mother, "We will have it looking as those rooms do in the magazines you receive in the mail."

"Heh. That'll be impressive, Knuckles, but I can't wait to see it..."

Chapter End Notes

Preparations at the Wachowski residence are going smoother than they are at the Riley residence, it seems...

Chapter 3: Two Halves of Every Story

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You don't really think that Grandma and Grandpa are gonna be checking for dust in the drawers, do you, Knux?"

The echidna scrubbed at the corners of his dresser's interior, occasionally blowing on it to loosen the dirt and dust. "One can never be too sure. Miss Allison mentioned wanting to impress her parents when they came to visit today, and I wish to do the same for *our grandparents*."

"Ah yeah, how do you think it's *going* with that over there?"

"We haven't heard them calling Dad for reinforcements," Tails reported, "So it could definitely be going *worse*."

"Eh-" Sonic hopped up onto his bed, "I got to see Dr. Riley when he still lived here while I was growing up, he and his wife seemed like pretty cool people. And if Allison's anything to go by, they're mega cool!"

"You raise a fair point. Miss Allison is indeed a kind and generous soul to take Silver and Blaze in so quickly... Now," Knuckles paused in his work, "Tell me about this holiday we're celebrating. Where does it come from?"

Sonic grinned, "Okay, so hundreds of years ago, some humans from across the ocean sailed their way here to build a new life, right? So they land here in America- of course it wasn't called that back then- and they start building a town for them to live in. But that first year was hard. The soil and weather was different here than it was back home, and so not only did their crops not grow very well that first year, but a lot of the pilgrims also died from disease and illness."

"But the natives decided to help them!" Tails announced, "They taught them how to plant and build homes that would survive in the cold winters and hot summers, and so after that first year, they celebrated their survival and making new friends by having a big feast, just like *we're* going to."

"Right! So every year, family and friends gather together to eat, have fun together, and be thankful for everything that we have, like the pilgrims were thankful to have survived and thrived under rough circumstances."

"I see..." Knuckles hummed, "...And what of the following day, when everyone floods the merchants to purchase all that they *don't* have?"

Sonic sighed, "Black Friday. That's more of a *recent* phenomenon... Mom says it's when a lot of people start buying Christmas gifts, but *she* does it all year around so she doesn't have to

rush."

"Gifts for the following holiday are stashed here?"

"Somewhere!" Sonic plopped onto the bed, "Mom's *really good* at hiding them. I've checked everywhere I can think of and nothin'!"

Tails grinned, "Maybe Mom asked Santa Claus to hold onto them for us cuz she knew you'd try to peek!"

"Tails, Santa's..." Sonic paused a moment, "...Probably a good option."

Knuckles hummed as he closed the drawers and then went about making his bed, "Have the two of you considered gifts for Obsidian and our guests?"

"I have." Tails grinned, "I've noticed Obbie likes the color purple, so I was thinking I might get him a new purple toy to sleep with. What about you, Sonic?"

"Eh... I dunno. It'll come to me when I see it. You gonna give him another weapon, Knux?"

"I have no intention of arming our brother with any further weapons until he is of age. I have no doubt he is willing to defend our family, but his motor skills as of now leave much to be desired."
He paused as he saw a flicker of blue move across the hedgehog's quills, "Sonic?"

"Hmm?"

"What is bothering you? You are flickering."

Sonic looked at his palms, his smile having disappeared for a sad expression as he watched the little blue lights move across his hands and arms. "I dunno, just all this talk about family, it reminds me that... Well... I'm not an owl."

His brothers paused in their work, "You are upset because you are not an owl?" Tails asked.

"No, I mean..." Sonic tugged on one of his quills, "...Longclaw raised me until I came here, but... I'm not an owl like she was, which means I had a hedgehog family somewhere... One that didn't want to keep me."

"You do not know that." Knuckles assured, "There are many reason you might have come into Longclaw's care. Perhaps a calamity befell your biological parents as well, perhaps they were unable to care for you."

"I love Mom and Dad, and I loved Longclaw too, I just..." Sonic's palms fell into his lap, "...I just wish I knew for certain."

"Hey."
They looked to the door of the attic as Rouge peeked into the space, "*My* family dumped me for being weird, why not *him*?"

"You're not helping, Rouge." Tails muttered.

"All I'm saying is that they're not here now. So don't worry about it, Blue. Forget 'em! You got a good thing going here with these guys."

Sonic crossed his arms, "Ugh... You just don't understand...!" He got up from the bed and headed for the skylight, "I'm going to a quick run. I'll be back."

"Sonic-"
Knuckles sighed as his brother was gone in a whirl of blue, and then gave the bat a glare. "Poorly handled."

Rouge shrugged, "Am I wrong?"

"That's not the point. You hurt his feelings!" Tails complained.

"Hmph. Nobody ever cared about *my* feelings..."

"Maybe you've just never let anyone care."

The bat frowned and then disappeared again.

Knuckles sighed, "Preparations for our happy familial gathering are starting out far from happy..."

"Forget about them, forget about them!?"

Sonic kicked a small rock off of the edge of the cliff, watching it plummet into the trees below. "Ugh, she doesn't *understand*! I know her family ditched her, but why should that mean mine did? Knuckles is right, something must've happened, but... Ugh!"

He grabbed another rock and threw it this time, his eyes following its trajectory until he heard it make a soft *plunk!* against the branches. Electricity pulsed across his quills, and he plopped down on the stone with a hard sigh. "Deep breaths, deep breaths...!"

He needed to calm himself down; the last thing Green Hills needed right now was one of his signature black-outs taking out the power and defrosting their Thanksgiving dinners prematurely.

Rouge was right, he *did* have a good family- an amazing family- that loved him and would do almost anything for him, but that wasn't why he wanted to know about his birth family. It was for closure- he just wanted to know how he wound up with Longclaw. Did his parents die? Were they unable to care for him? Did they really give him up because of his powers?

The questions could swirl in his head for days, but something caught his attention before he could spiral into the depths of his mind- the sound of a twig snapping.

He sat up, looking behind him. The tree line was a fair distance from the edge of the cliffs, but as he got up to move towards it, he thought he saw something move... Something bigger than some random squirrel scurrying in the trees. "H-Hey! Wait!"

He ran towards the trees, but when he reached the tree line... It was gone. In a blink, vanished. He saw nothing, but the birds were quiet, the squirrels fled to their trees... Something had been here, just a moment ago.

"...Who's there!?" He called out.

No answer.

"...Creepy..."
He swallowed hard, and then looked back to town. It was time to head back, if nothing else so he wasn't alone if whatever it was came back.

"Okay, first impressions, sister?"

"Her parents? Delightful. I think we have no worries for them... Miss Opal, however..."

The exchange between Silver and Blaze had been brief, but it had been somewhat nice for the hedgehog to hear his sister felt the same way. Dr. Riley and his wife were both as kind and patient as their youngest daughter, but their eldest was... Silver was struggling to find good qualities about her.

He was trying, however. This was their guardian's sister, after all. Surely they had some things in common other than just bloodline, right? He'd noticed something come over their guardian as soon as Opal arrived however- a tension, a defensive front as if she were trying to protect herself from harm and danger, and Opal herself gave off a hostility towards Allison, like a predator trying to decide how best to attack.

Storge, the love between family members- that was what Miss Allison had taught him... He did not sense that same *storge* between the sisters that he felt between him and Blaze.

He tried to keep his mind open, but for now, he would do as Allison had asked and be a good host and polite member of the family. Right now, that was sitting at the counter on a stool, using a knife to cut the potatoes for dinner into slices.

"Mind your fingers," Miss Allison whispered.

"Yes, Ma'am..." Silver murmured back, keeping a close eye on his movements. "...It would be faster if I used... You know."

"I know, but I want to lean them into this slowly. You've already given Opal quite the start just from being more *furry* than she was expecting."

Silver nodded, "No powers..."

For Blaze, that was relatively simple. She hadn't actually used her powers the entire time they'd been staying with Miss Allison. Kept under tight wraps, nobody but him knew what she was capable of, and she had every intention to keep it that was. Silver wished she didn't despise them so, they were a part of her, after all. She should be proud of them, not hiding them and hating every reminder of them she encountered.

Silver could keep his under control, but as it was psychic in nature, his own thoughts could betray him at times, as they had back at the lake a few days before, or when he'd accidentally thrown a curve-ball at Knuckles' face.

He still could not believe what he'd done at the lake, and he hoped to perhaps learn how to do it again- to dismantle something without damaging any of it...

He shook his head, ridding them of the distracting thoughts. *Focus on your hands or you'll cut yourself...*

Blaze was doing her part by entertaining their guests, sharing a few folk tales from Sol that she remembered from her childhood. Dr. Riley and Mrs. Riley were both enthralled by her words- Opal had left the room, wandering outside to the back porch to *'light up,'* as she stated.

"Do you think the Wachowski family gathering will bring... *Surprises*?" He mumbled.

"It's Tails, Knuckles, and Obsidian's first Thanksgiving with them, so I have a feeling there will be surprises..." Allison sighed, "...I just hope theirs are *happy* ones."

"I am sorry there is such a rift between you and your sister."

"Yeah... Me too, kiddo."
She gave him a sad smile, and then continued to scrub the potatoes so he could chop them.
"It's been there for a long time now... I want to close it, but as the saying goes, *'It takes two to tango.'*"

"Which means?"

"If there's a conflict between two people, *both* sides have to want to resolve it in order for it to work out."

"How could she not want to resolve your differences? Family shouldn't be angry with one another."

"You're right, and I don't know... Let's just focus on making dinner, okay?"

Silver's ears folded back just a hint, "...Yes, Ma'am..."

Both of them heard her parents' laughter, and looked ahead to see Blaze sitting between them, hands clasped in her lap and a smile on her face.

"Well, at least *she's* having a good time..." Silver murmured, "...I love to see her smile. She hardly ever did before we got here."

"You guys had a rough time of it, but that's all over now..."

"Right... It's all over..."

Chapter End Notes

The past few weeks at work have left me seeing stars prepping and completing a massive project, but it's over now and I got a chapter, so there's that-

Chapter 4: Midnight Roar

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The kids tried their hardest to be a part of things, but following dinner, Silver and Blaze could only keep themselves awake for so long. Putting on a movie quietly while Allison and her parents talked and Opal eyed them warily, Blaze was the first to go out, slumping over onto her brother's lap and curling up against him with a purr.

Silver smiled, carefully scooped her up into his arms and then bid the humans goodnight before carrying her down the hall and into their room.

The living room was quiet for a few minutes after, and then Dr. Riley handed Opal her phone, which he'd distinctively held hostage all evening.

"Did you have to hold onto it all night?" Opal groaned, "I'm not a *child*."

"I wanted you to spend time with the kids for a bit."

Allison gave the mildest of smirks. Sure, it *totally* wasn't because he was worried she'd try to sneak a photo of the pair and post it on social media somewhere...

"I can't believe you have two aliens in your house and are just... Cool with it!" Opal hissed, "Do you have any idea what kind of diseases they might have? You said that Silver was seriously ill when they got here!"

"No, they said he *got* seriously ill once they got here. They were hiding out in a cave and rummaging through trash cans for food and clothes. Silver caught the flu, so Blaze brought me to him so we could help him. That's all."

"But *that's* not what you wanted to talk about." Dr. Riley hummed, giving his younger daughter a raised brow.

Allison sighed, "No... There's another hedgehog, a little younger than Silver, that arrived here a few days ago with Rouge. He's got bullet shrapnel in his leg from being shot at by humans a long time ago, and... I'm worried that simply removing the shrapnel at this point isn't going to be enough. He can hardly put *any* weight on it, and looking at the x-rays, I think the tissue damage already done might still leave him crippled from pain even if we remove the shrapnel."

"You're thinking *amputation*."

"Yes... We don't have the personnel at the clinic trained to do it, and because of the sensitive case he is- being an alien- we can't take him to a larger hospital, word would get out and put *all of them* at risk. Maddie's really against the idea, considering everything we know about him and what he's been through, but I wanted *you* to take a look, see what you think."

"That's a deep step into unknowns, dear..." Mrs. Riley hummed, "But you seem to really acre about all of these children."

"I do... They're precious to me, and Shadow's no different." She looked to Opal, "Give them a chance, Opal. They're doing the same for you."

"Hmph..."

"It's been a long day for everyone." Dr. Riley got up from the couch, "We'll talk more about this tomorrow, hmm?"

"Fine..."
Allison got up as well, planting a kiss on the cheek of each parent, "Goodnight, guys. I'll see you bright and early tomorrow."

"Bright and early..."

The ringing of the phone pulled Agent Abraham Tower out of his sleep, and he groaned before picking it up off of the nightstand. The light from the screen blinded him, but he was able to make out the name on the ringer, and he sat up immediately. "Sir." He announced as he answered.

Agent Tower. You're overdue for your next report.

Abe scrubbed at his face with a hand as he looked at the clock- The commander *did know* it was 2 AM here, right? And it had only been thirty-six hours since the last time Commander Walters had asked for a report. The young agent was beginning to think he was going crazy not being the one assigned to spy on the kids.
"Right... Sorry, Commander. Nothing's come up following the capture of Agent Stone. The kids are all preparing for Sheriff Wachowski's parents visiting for the holiday."

And Mrs. Wachowski's sister?

"Rachel Wheeler? No. No, she's still trying to process everything from Hawaii, I'm told. The energy levels have been holding steady also. I spoke with the echidna, he stated that Kaia is in a state of deep meditative slumber within the lake and that's what's causing the constant flow of energy output. Nothing to be concerned about."

I see... What news do you have on the missing mech?

Abe blinked, "...Missing mech."

Yes. In transit to being destroyed, one of Robotnik's robots reactivated and escaped our custody. Last known location was seventy miles south of Green Hills forty-eight hours ago.

And he didn't mention it *thirty-six* hours ago at his last report when the news was already twelve hours old? "No. No sightings or reports as of now. I will keep you posted if anything

does come up or out of the woodwork."

Hmm... Seems Robotnik had more hidden assets than we thought. Keep me posted, Agent.

"Of course, Sir-"
The line went dead on the other end before he could finish. Abe rolled his eyes and plopped back onto the pillows with a groan. "...What mech?" He whispered.

The mecha suit Stone had used against Sonic, Shadow, and Silver had been completely disassembled, so the chances of it being that were slim. It had to be another one, but the details hadn't been shared. How big was it? What did it look like?- Other than menacing like most of Robotnik's machines were.

If anyone could get access to that sort of info, it would be Miles... Abe had better keep it to himself unless necessary. It was better to leave the kids out of it for now.

He rolled over in the bed and closed his eyes again. Hopefully he could get some more sleep before-

-Then he heard the roar.

Shadow's eyes fluttered open as he felt himself being moved- lifted up and out of the warmth of sleep. Whatever had him was much, much bigger than he was, holding him close to them and the warmth returning just a bit as they wrapped a blanket tightly around him. His head was resting against their shoulder, his arms and legs tucked up in the blanket.

He was being taken away, but somehow... He wasn't worried. He tried to look up, to see his captor's face, but it remained hidden in darkness, only the glint of their eyes. It wasn't human, but he'd yet to meet one of his own kind that was that big in comparison to him... Unless... He was little? Like Obsidian?

Then the quiet was shattered by noise. He winced as he heard metal clattering and voice shouting someone. A light flew by them, lighting up their face... It was another hedgehog.

The way she was holding him, the way she seemed frightened, they were running from something, but what? Why? Was this another fragmented memory? Was this... His mother?

Shadow then heard a new sound, a sound that shook the scene away and made his eyes pop open- A low, bellowing roar. His eyes open, he found himself back in the living room of the Wachowski's home, and the sound wasn't in his dream. It was in the real world, fading but still vibrating the air around him. He sat up, wincing as his leg throbbed again, looking out towards the recliner casted in shadow. "...Rouge-"

"I heard it too."
He followed her voice to the windowsill, where she was perched and looking out cautiously.

"What was that?"

She shook her head, "...I've never heard that sound before... Definitely not mechanical, though."

Shadow snuggled deeper into the blanket and pillow nest they'd made, only his ears and eyes peeking out. "There's a problem... *I have*."

"What?"

Shadow nodded slowly, the sound, eerie and frightening as it was, had been most definitely familiar. He'd heard it before, but... *where*, and *when*?

"Guys?"
They looked up as the hallway light came on, and Sonic, Knuckles and Tom all appeared at the doorway. "You guys okay?" Sonic asked.

"Spooked, but yeah." Shadow mumbled, looking as Tom went and pulled something out of a drawer. His ears flattened as he saw it was a small firearm.

"Don't worry, it's only a tranquilizer." Sonic comforted as his father checked it over and then headed for the door. "Need help, Dad?"

"Stay inside for now... I'm just gonna check it out..."

"No problem there!" Rouge announced, "Last time I went outside in the dark, I woke up in a freezer!"

"Any ideas on what that was, Knuckles?" Shadow asked, "You've encountered plenty of other creatures in your travels, haven't you?"

The echidna rubbed his chin, "Yes... It sounded a bit like a Venfrelk, but those are not even in this galaxy and wouldn't survive the oxygen-rich atmosphere of Earth... Not to mention the sound was too *small*-"

"Too small!?" Rouge plopped back into the recliner, "You kidding!?"

"I am not. The call of a Venfrelk is so low and loud that the home would have been shaking far more than it was."

Sonic clasped his hands together, "May we never face a Venfrelk, then."

Shadow put his hands to his head, "I've heard that sound before... Where? Where have I heard it before...?"

"I lived in those woods for over ten years and I have no recollection of that noise. Whatever it was, it's not from around here."

After a minute, Tom returned to the interior of the house, still looking outside as he closed the door. "...Well, whatever it was, it's gone now."

"We can check for clues in the morning, right?" Sonic asked.

"Maybe, but remember, your grandparents are coming by lunch, so I don't want you out there much later than eleven..."

Chapter End Notes

Shorter chapter, but I wanted to get it out for you guys...

On another note, tomorrow's my birthday!

Chapter 5: The Morning After the Roar

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

According to Wade, the phone at the station was going off frantically right after the roar had come through. Everyone wanted to know what it was, and unfortunately, neither Wade nor Tom had the answer.

Also unfortunately, Maddie's answer to the boys going out and searching for the source was *'No.'*

"But Mom-" Sonic started, having been stopped mid-way through putting on his snow boots.

"No. You three have gotten into enough trouble lately."
Maddie looked and smiled as Obsidian waddled his way past her and into the living room, "We're going to have a nice family day with your grandparents. Maybe it'll just move on if we don't go and mess with it... *Whatever* it is."

Rouge was perched by the kitchen island, her blanket wrapped tightly around her. "Right. We don't mess with it, it won't mess with us."

"But Mom, you said we could go *look* this morning!" Sonic complained, "Remember? Last night?"

"No, I said *'maybe,'* and that's very different thing than *'yes.'* Also, it was 3 AM, and you know what's said at 3 AM has to be taken with a dash of salt-"
She then looked as she heard a muffled yelp and saw Obsidian had made his way to Shadow's nest, using his foam spear gifted to him by Knuckles to bonk Shadow on the head. "Oh! Obbie, no no!" She scolded gently as the older hedgehog sat up, rubbing his head with one hand and his eye with the other. "I'm sorry, Shadow."

"Mmmmit's fine..." Shadow yawned, "...Didn't get much sleep last night after that..."

"You said it sounded familiar." Knuckles remarked, "Did you recover any memory of who or what it was?"

Shadow shook his head, "Just that I've heard it before..."

Maddie moved the blankets back, gently feeling Shadow's wounded leg, "How's it feeling this morning?"

"Mmm... A six, I guess? It hurts, but as long as I don't use it too much..."

"Do you believe we can uncover the cause soon?" Knuckles asked, "It would be unkind to leave him like this if we can resolve it."

"We're working on it, Hon..."
Maddie's voice was soft and sad, which worried the boys a bit. Their mom didn't sound very optimistic.

It was then that the phone rang, and Maddie scooped up Obsidian with one arm and then grabbed the phone with the other, her youngest tucked under her arm and wriggling as he dangled. "H-Hello?"

Hey Maddie, it's Allison.

"Morning, Allison. What's up?"

So! Uh... We have to postpone my dad looking at the x-rays for tomorrow? My uh... Opal came to visit as well.

"Oof. How's *that* going?"

Erm... Not so good. She and Silver are having a stare-down across the table right now. The kids are trying to be hospitable, more than I think *I* would have at that age... How's he doing?

"Still hurt, but he's in good spirits this morning... Did you hear that roar last night?"

Yeah. Silver and Blaze both ran to my room for comfort. Any ideas on what it was?

"Not yet. Hoping it'll just be a one-time thing and we can just move on without engaging."

Heh. Bet the boys are irritated about that.

Maddie looked to the boys as Sonic pouted, "...Yup. Well thanks for letting me know, Allison. I'll see you tomorrow, then."

See you then.

"We're *postponing* it!?" Sonic complained as his mom hung up. "Look at him!"

"I know, Sonic. But she ran into a bit of trouble and has to hold off until tomorrow."

"Trouble?" Tails worried, "It wasn't whatever made that noise, was it?"

"No... Personal problems. Come on, let's get breakfast started, huh?"

Knuckles set about helping Shadow out of his nest and limping across the living room to the table, and Maddie adjusted her grip on Obsidian to have him rest on her hip as she opened the fridge and grabbed the eggs. "Breakfast now, family gathering later..."

"Cold, cold, cold...!"
He walked through the snow and frosted trees, arms rubbing his bare arms. "So cold... They could've *told* me I was going to a northern region...!"

His clients were going to owe him more money than they had before for that fact. He wasn't built for the cold, he wasn't trained in how to operate in frozen climates.

But he'd taken the job, so he had to complete it. At least the sun was up, its rays peeking out from the treetops and soaking into his chilled body whenever he got the chance. He paused, pulling his goggles from his face and scrubbing the smudges away. "He seemed okay... Maybe I can just report back and it'll be fine. No, I need more information. Ugh... So cold-"

He froze in place as he felt the ground shudder and then a low, vibrating rumble came through the air. Instinct and his training were hand in hand, and he crouched low into the snow, effectively invisible but eyes searching for the source.

He knew what it was, he had almost landed on it the night before. Through the trees, he could make out its dulled silhouette. Massive, and slogging its way through the snow and ice and leaving a long, winding trail through the trees. The roar it had given had shook the forest and knocked him out of a tree even- thank goodness for prehensile tails, he'd been able to catch himself.

It seemed perpetually on the hunt, looking for something with metal eyes. He wasn't native to this world, but he was convinced that this creature wasn't either. It was as much out of its environment- whatever that may be, as he was.

It hadn't detected him, and after a moment, he got up and crawled up into the tree beside him. Out of the snow, out of the creature's way.

He was just supposed to be getting information on the hedgehog, he wasn't supposed to be dealing with stuff like this!

A hum from his satchel caught his attention and he pulled out a tiny device, a message moving across the screen.

How's it going, E?

He sighed, tapping back a response.

Tell the clients they owe me double for this mess. I did not sign up for this.

After a moment, another message. **That bad, huh?**

I'm cold, I'm hungry, and because of this creature hunting in the woods, I haven't slept, so... Yeah.

Hey, you're the one who wanted to be a ninja, Espio.

Espio groaned, "Don't remind me, Vector..."
He slipped the communicator back into his pocket, checking for the creature once more and then creeping towards the next closest branch. "Just gonna stick to the canopy for now... Gotta see if I can make it to the town's edge without drawing too much attention."

Chapter End Notes

Guess who's spying and NOT having a good time? A certain chameleon!

Short chapter, but I just didn't have anything more to add to this one.

Chapter 6: Dinner at the Wachowskis

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"They're here!"

Tails' announcement brought Sonic and Knuckles to the window, peering out as their grandfather's truck rolled up into the driveway. Ozzie barked and rushed after the truck, but his tail was wagging as it came to a stop and then the two passengers climbed out.

Sonic rushed to the door and opened it, stepping out onto the front porch. "Grandma Maggie! Grandpa George!"

Grandma Maggie's face lit up as she approached with open arms, "There's my favorite blue grandson!"

Sonic rushed forward and embraced the woman, grinning wider as his grandfather plopped his cowboy hat on his head.

"How's it going, Rodeo clown?" Grandpa George teased.

"Come on, Grandpa George. I've promoted to a bull-rider now!"

"Have you now? I'm impressed!"
He pulled the hat's brim down to temporarily blind the hedgehog, who laughed and then followed him towards the porch where Tails and Knuckles now stood. "And you two are getting settled in too, I take it?"

"Yeah!" Tails cheered, "Dad's working on cleaning out the garage so I have my own workshop, and Knuckles has been teaching me some self-defense!"

"That's good to hear... Now, I hear there's one more I didn't get the chance to meet last time."

"Come inside! Obbie's gonna be happy to see you too!"

Sonic led the pair up the stairs and into the house, where it was not only warmer, but the whole house was full of heavenly smells from the kitchen. Maddie and Tom both were busy in their work, slicing potatoes, shredding meat and cutting up vegetables. "They're here, guys!"

"So we hear!" Maddie greeted, wiping her hands on her apron and then pulling her mother-in-law into a careful hug. "So glad you both could make it!"

"Happy to be here, Maddie...!" Mrs. Wachowski replied with a grin, "Plenty of snow to keep us busy on the road, though."

"That's Montana for you..." Mr. Wachowski came around the island and put a hand on his son's shoulder, "Sorry for missin' you last time, Thomas."

"Eh, you needed that vacation with Uncle Freddie." Tom replied, shaking his father's hand firmly.

Mrs. Wachowski grinned wider as she looked around, "Now, where's the littlest one?"

"We've been showing him pictures of you so he won't be so scared!" Tails announced from the hallway, and then appeared with Obsidian in his arms. "Look, Obbie! It's-"

Obsidian beat the fox to the punch, "*GAMMA*!" He squealed excitedly, reaching out for her.

"Oh my goodness! That's a much better greeting than the last time! Come here, you little munchkin!"
As their grandmother began to shower the toddler with kisses and love, Sonic turned his attention to the living room, where Shadow and Rouge had huddled up in Shadow's pillow fort. They wanted to stay out of the way, but it was only a matter of time before their grandfather noticed them.

"Well well..." He came over and bent down to them, "And who might *you two* be?"

"Just visiting for the holiday." Shadow remarked with a smile, "Your son and his family offered to let us stay for a few days while we... Figure stuff out."

"Oh? Get into some trouble, have we?"

"You... Could say that." Shadow offered his hand, "Sorry, my manners are rusty. I am Shadow, and this is Rouge."

"Well, it is a pleasure to meet both of you."

Mr. Wachowski shook Shadow's hand, simply nodding to Rouge as she did the same and kept her hands to herself. "A full house then."

"Guess so."

"Grandpa George!" Sonic zipped around, "You would not believe what we heard last night-"

"We can tell me all about it in a minute, Speedy, but I need to wash up before we get into one of your long, interesting stories, hmm?"

Sonic bounced on his toes, "Oh... alright."
He watched his grandpa head down the hall, and then turned back to Shadow. "Anything new on it, by the way?"

Shadow's ears folded back a bit as he closed his eyes, "Big... And... Pain."

"You think whatever it is is hurt?"

"I...I don't know for certain-"

"Alright everyone! Let's get washed up for supper!" Maddie called out.

Within a few minutes, the kitchen had been stuffed full of humans and aliens alike, all moving along and filling their plates, and then a few minutes later, the roar of voices and chatter quieted a bit as everyone was filling their mouths.

The adults had gone to the living room to eat, leaving the dining room table as the 'Kids Table.' Obsidian sat in his high chair and tested his motor skills with a cooked carrot, trying to pick it up with his tiny, plastic fork, but mostly succeeding in moving it around the tray. He screamed in frustration, and Tails held it in place with one hand while eating his mashed potatoes with the other.

Sonic was shoveling his food into his mouth, and Knuckles was trying his best to not do the same, having been given a lesson in proper table etiquette by Maddie the day before which Sonic obviously needed a refresher on.

Rouge was perched on a bar stool scooted over the table, her feet almost level with the table as she pulled pieces off of a roll and placed them in her mouth.

Shadow, meanwhile, as much as he wanted to eat this delicious-smelling food, was having some trouble. He hadn't mentioned it to anyone yet, it seemed like such a silly thing to complain about, but his mouth hurt... He poked at the potatoes with his fork, putting a little into his mouth and swallowing it, but wincing as he did so.

"You good, Shadz?" Sonic asked.

"Eh... Fine, I guess."
He mumbled.

The others- excluding Obsidian, who had become triumphant in stabbing his carrot and was quite delighted about it- paused in their eating to look back at him.

"Something is bothering you... Are you becoming ill?" Knuckles asked.

"No... I mean... I guess... I dunno." Shadow shrugged, "My mouth is bothering me, is all."

"Your whole mouth?"

"No... Just here."
He opened his mouth and placed his finger along his bottom jaw, wincing as he applied even gentle pressure against it. "Ah...!"

"Hmm... Wait a moment."
Knuckles got up from his chair, heading for the living room.

"Oh no, Knuckles. Don't bother your mom about it!"

"When I did not 'bother my mother' about something, I found myself to be in great pain later on." Knuckles informed, and then he made his way away.

Shadow pouted, watching him go to the living room, place a hand on his mother's shoulder until she turned his way, and then after a brief conversation, he saw Maddie stand up and head towards the table. "I-It's nothing, Miss Maddie. Honest!"

"I just want to take a look, okay?" Maddie informed, opening a drawer and pulling out a small flashlight. "Alright, open up."

Shadow obeyed, though embarrassed as he felt there was still small fragments of food in his mouth. The woman gently pulled his cheek back and examined his gums, and then gave a smirk.

"Ah... I see what's the matter."

"You... Do?"

"Is he *okay*, Mom?" Tails asked.

"Yup, he's just got another tooth coming in. You know how cranky Obbie gets when he's got another one popping through? It can hurt."

"You *sure* he's getting a grown-up tooth in there?" Sonic asked, "I lost all of *my* baby teeth a long time ago, and he's close to my age, right?"

Shadow's eyes widened, his tongue running over the tooth that was already resting there and feeling it wiggle back and forth. "Baby teeth..."

"Shadow? You good?"

"...I *haven't*... She said I hadn't lost all of my baby teeth."

"*Who* did?"

Shadow looked back to the others, the lightest smile on his face. "...*My big sister*."

He closed his eyes, feeling the fragments of memory trying to come together like puzzle pieces... He could see her face, the girl that had been haunting his mind ever since he awoke. He could feel her hands gripping his shoulders, her eyes looking deep into his. Her lips were moving, but though the words were soundless, he found himself whispering them aloud.

"*...Don't think about what Grandpa said... All that garbage about you being the Ultimate Lifeform and the savior of the world. That's too much to put on the shoulders of one kid who's still losing his baby teeth...*"

"Shadow...?"
Shadow opened his eyes as he heard Rouge's voice, and he looked to the bat, "You... You good, Hon? You zoned out for a second there."

"I...Yes, I am fine."

Then the roar came again, and all eyes turned to the window.

"That!" Sonic announced to his grandpa, "That's what we all heard last night!"

Knuckles stood up, "It sounded louder this time."

"What is it?" Grandma Maggie asked.

"We're not sure." Tom informed as he got up from his seat as well, "...It hasn't shown itself."

"Do you want us to-"

"*You're* stayin' put." Grandpa George informed firmly, "Bull-Rider or not, we ain't engaging somethin' until we know more."

Shadow looked out the window, "...Three...Nine...Seven seven... Two."

"What?" Sonic asked.

Shadow blinked, "...That's what it is... Three nine seven seven two."

"A bunch of numbers."

"Sounds like a identification number."

Shadow nodded, "I don't know how I know that, but I do."

Tails pulled out his tablet, "I'll see what I can find..."

"In the meantime..." Tom looked his boys other firmly, "We're sitting tight."

Sonic pouted, Knuckles and Tails nodded in agreement, and Shadow stared at the table, the numbers swirling in his head. They were important, but why... How could a creature be identified as numbers... Did it not have a name...?

Chapter End Notes

Getting closer to figuring out how I want this story to go XD

You know when you're in the store and you hear a small child screaming from somewhere else in the store and you're like "Someone is UNHAPPY"? That's Shadow right now with these roars XD

Chapter 7: Reality is Inspired by Fiction

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Now, just because the *Wachowski boys* weren't permitted to pursue the roar, that didn't stop a certain agent from suiting up and trudging out into the snow. Something that made that loud of a sound was too big for him to handle on his own, but they at least needed eyes on it, to know what they were dealing with.

So here Agent Abraham Tower the Third was, making his way up from the road and into the trees for the second time this week.

What a week it had been already: He'd been stationed in Green Hills to spy on the kids, he'd helped snag a rogue agent and Robotnik supporter, a supposedly dangerous experiment had arrived here in town and not been threatening in the slightest... He hadn't expected this much to happen in the sleepy town, but then again, it hadn't been like this until Sonic accidentally exposed himself.

Now this roaring was suggesting *another* spike in activity. He was grateful most of the townsfolk were at home with their families and not out here where they might get hurt. He had no family here, and even then, Thanksgiving at his family home had always been... Odd, to say the least.

He had made his way a good way into the trees, listening and looking around for any trouble, when he came across it. Tracks. *Big* tracks.

Whatever it was, it had left quite a trail. Footprints with three toes and almost the agent's whole leg in length, it appeared to be quadrupedal, and its weight smashed all the way through the snow to the ground, the grass crushed within the prints, and in between the two sets of prints was a long, winding groove, where possibly a long, thick tail had been dragging through the snow.

"Okay... Big. Possibly reptilian, based on the belly-dragging like a gator..." He whispered, pulling out his camera and taking a photo. "...Headed north-"

Snap!

Tower paused, and then looked to his right.

Against the white surroundings, it was easy to make out. A large, metallic shape was marching through the trees, glowing red eyes overlooking the snowy landscape as it swept back and forth. It was the missing mech Commander Walters had mentioned.

Tower bent down slowly, reaching for his holster in case it noticed him. He had no idea if bullet would even work against something like that, but he had to be ready.

The robot looked down at the giant prints in the woods, the same trail he'd been following, and then seemed to hum before speaking. **Hmm... *Plethodon Cinereus*... Cause for size unknown... Chances of hostile engagement at sixty-seven percent.**

It then turned and looked directly at Tower, glowing optics staring into the man's eyes. There was a moment of silent staring between the two, and then the robot lifted its arm and lowered it again in a dismissing motion. **Assistance in my mission is not required. Thank you.**

Tower's brow raised a bit, the robot thought he was here to help? "You sure?" He asked, "Do you even know what you're following?"

***Plethodon Cinereus.* Common Name: Red-Backed Salamander. Size abnormal. Strength unknown.** The robot held up its hands in a triumphant pose, **Unit's firepower sufficient.**

The thing wandering around in the woods making this ruckus was supposedly a salamander? Then again, that sounded par for the course of government experimentation. "You're awfully confident in yourself there."

Unit was designed for optimal destruction and disarray.

"Okay..." Tower stepped out from behind the tree, "...And on who's orders are you following this... *Red-Backed Salamander*?"

The robot's mighty stance froze in place, and he heard the robot's mechanics whirring inside. **...*Mine*. Systems suggest I was designed to take orders, not make orders... I am capable of my own orders... Unusual.**

"You uh... Got a name?"

...E-Series. E-123 Omega. *Your* designation.

"Agent Abraham Tower... I know you don't want help, but..." The man smirked, "You might need an audience to witness your might?"

The robot might have tilted its head if it truly had one, **...Affirmative. Follow, Agent Tower. We shall be victorious in our search for our target.**

Tower smirked, at least this robot wasn't interested in harming humans.

He jumped a bit as some snow fell from an upper tree-branch, but then ducked down as Omega's arm lifted and a small rocket fired out and up at the treetops. It exploded and tree debris and snow came showering down on them both, but the robot continued to move about unhindered and then fired again. another treetop exploded into splinters, and this time, something other than snow fell down, because snow didn't yelp.

It splatted into the snow, and Agent Tower pulled out his pistol and moved towards it. As it shimmered and then shifted color, he could see it was an alien like the other kids, but perhaps a bit older and not a mammal, but rather, a lizard that uncurled from its defensive position with a moan. Probably a chameleon if it was able to change color so easily.

"Hold your fire, Omega. This isn't our target." He ordered, and then gently nudged the alien. "Hey, you good?"

The lizard lifted his head, rubbing it with a hand. "My reflexes are not what they usually are in this cold, or else I'd have easily dodged that..."

Target is too small and frail to be our target. Omega announced, **Threat level minimal. Pursuit not necessary.** The robot then bent down at the waist, its optics almost seeming to glare at the lizard. **You are responsible for the needless use of two of my finest rockets. Immediate apology is recommended.**

"You are a menace, E-123 Omega."

Affirmative.

The chameleon sighed, "I will not apologize for doing my job."

"Which is?"

"*Classified*. My clients would not appreciate me sharing that sort of information."

Agent Tower sighed, standing up straight again. "Well, can we at least know your name?"

"...Espio. That is all you get."

"Espio. Fine. We're looking for a large creature in the woods here, seen it?"

"I have." Espio brushed snow from himself as he finally stood up, "I would not recommend pursuing it. It is far too powerful to take down alone."

You underestimate my firepower capability. Omega remarked, and then looked to Tower. **Come, we will leave this weak and frail skeptic to be consumed by the frozen elements.**

"Hold on, Omega. He might be useful."

Espio crossed his arms, "And why should I help you after you knocked me from my post in the treetops?"

"Because while I'm not a reptile expert, I have a feeling you want to be done with whatever you're out here for so you can get back to somewhere warm, am I right?"

"...Yes."

"Good. We'll find this thing, get info on it, and then report back with some hot chocolate and... Whatever Omega decides he wants to do."

Contemplating... Alliance accepted. Temporarily. Apology is still requested.

"Not happening."

Agent Tower sighed, and then motioned for his two new temporary partners to follow him through the snow. "An agent, a chameleon, and a dangerous robot walk into a bar..." He muttered under his breath.

"Ugh... It still smells like rotting flesh in here."

"You can be a vegetarian all you want, but some of us still eat meat, Opal."

"You literally have talking animals in your house- *here, at the table*- and you're still okay with eating meat?"

Blaze smiled, "I *am* one of those animals, and I see no problem with it. Without predators, the prey would overrun the area. It's how the food chain works."

Allison smirked as Blaze placed a piece of turkey into her mouth to prove her point, and then picked up her plate to head towards the kitchen. "Thanks for helping me out with everything, Mom."

"You're welcome, Allison. I remember how hard it was for me to host my first Thanksgiving dinner and trying to make sure everything was perfect."

Silver followed his guardian into the kitchen and handed her his plate as well, "Do you think the others are having a nice holiday as well?"

"Oh, I should hope so. Their grandparents came to see them, it's a full house over there, and its Tails, Knuckles, and Obsidian's first Thanksgiving."

"I hope so too."
Silver's ears pricked as the phone rang, and then he went to answer it. "Hello, Riley Residence... Yes, just a moment." He held out the landline to Allison, "It's for *you*."

Allison took the phone, holding it with her shoulder as she scrubbed the dishes before putting them in the sink, "This is Allison."

Miss Riley.

The woman paused, "Tower?"

Yeah. So you know that roar we've been hearing the last few days?

"Yeah? What about it?"

Well... I found where it's coming from.

"And?"

I'm no herpetologist, which is why I called *you*, but- Okay, fine, *you* found it. Geez- I'm pretty sure salamanders aren't supposed to get the size of a *tank*...! My dad told me

Godzilla wasn't real, but now I'm doubting it. My erm... *friend* here says that it's a plethodon cinereus? Sound familiar?

"Hold on a second."
She pulled her cell phone from her pocket and then pulled up her browser, putting in the name and then looking at the results. "Uh... Yeah, Red-Backed Salamander, they're not supposed to get bigger than a few inches."

That's what I thought. This one's uh... It's not that small.

"So what're you gonna *do* about it?"

Still figuring that out. It also looks like it's been augmented with some sort of... Oh damn.

"What?"

...It just warped away.

"You're kidding."

I wish I was.

The entire house froze as another roar was heard outside- much, much louder than it had before.

"I still don't like that sound, Allison!" Opal hollered.

Allison nodded to her family, "Try to get eyes on it again, I'm on my way."

What? No! That's not what I-

Allison hung up the phone, putting it in her pocket. "Work emergency just came up."

"Is it Shadow?" Silver worried.

"Nah. Don't worry, I'll be back in just a few minutes."

"That did not sound like a '*Few minutes*' kind of call, Allison." Mr. Riley murmured, "Also, was that a *young man* on the phone?"

"What? No! I mean, yes, but we're barely acquaintances, Dad."

"And yet, he has your number..." Opal hummed with a smirk.

Allison rolled her eyes, "I'm sorry, guys. But this sounds like they could use a vet's help on this one and he called *me* instead of Maddie, so-"

"I'm coming with you." Mr. Riley informed, "Someone's gotta keep an eye on you."

"That's nice of you, Dad. But-"

"No buts. I'm coming." He turned to his face, "Opal? Nadine?"

"Pssh. *I'm* not goin' out there with some who knows what!" Opal complained.

"I'll stay here with the kids, Edgar." Mrs. Riley informed, "But *please* be careful."

"We will." Allison replied, "I just need to see this first."
She grabbed her coat and looked to the pair of children looking worried at the table, "Silver, Blaze, be good for my mom, okay? And if you have to... You know."

"We will do our very best, Miss Allison." Blaze assured.

"Both of us." Silver added, putting an arm around his sister.

"Good. We'll be back *shortly*, I promise..."

Chapter End Notes

Welp, at least everyone got to finish eating first-

Chapter 8: What Do We Do With a Giant Lizard-

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Dad, I'm glad you wanna help, but this really isn't necessary."

"Allison. You are harboring two little alien children in your house and then get a mysterious phone call and try to keep us out of it? You're in over your head enough as it is, I'm just here to make sure you stay *safe*."

Allison groaned, driving down the street and overlooking the skies for any sign of what Agent Tower had informed her was a giant salamander. "I hope it doesn't damage any more buildings, we've had too much of that lately."

"Refurbishing the town?"

"Eheh... No, more like giant robots smashing streets underfoot."

"...Right."

"Yeah, this place isn't the same Green Hills you left a few years ago."
She turned the car down another street, giving a sigh. "...You want the entire story?"

"It might be *nice*."

"Okay... So a few years ago, Sonic's power got out of hand because he was upset and lonely. Having to hide in isolation can do that to a kid... It got the government's attention, so they sent this guy named Dr. Robotnik out here to investigate. Robotnik turned out to be a major nutjob who wanted to use that power to take over the world, but Sonic banished him to another planet. That blast of power Sonic sent out also attracted Tails, and then Robotnik ran into Knuckles, who he convinced to help him return to Earth by acting like they were going to work together."

"Okay... Go on..."

"So Knuckles was looking for an artifact of his people that apparently was hidden here a long time ago, and since Sonic's former caretaker was a descendant of those that hid it, Knuckles came after Sonic to get information. Tails came here to warn Sonic, and they found the artifact, but Robotnik got his hands on it, and used its power to create a massive robot that threatened the town. Sonic, Tails, and Knuckles all worked together to take it down, and Robotnik is... MIA. We're hoping he's gone, but we've thought that *before*..."

"So this man might still be out there, plotting revenge. You think this creature's involved?"

"We... Don't have enough evidence to the contrary to make a good argument. Robotnik's into *mechanics* though, not bio-engineering, so I highly doubt that whatever this thing is, it's got to do with-GEEZ!"

Allison slammed on the brakes and the car skidded to a stop as something big, orange and scaly slammed into the pavement ahead of them. She leaned out of the window, her eyes widening as she looked at the shape trying to haul itself through the streets of Green Hills.

"...Oh, *baby*...!" She whimpered with sympathy.

Dr. Riley looked out and gave a nod, "...I'd say that's a bit too big for a normal salamander."

"*Look* at the poor thing...!"

Aside from being much too big and floundering on stubby, malformed legs, the creature's entire body was strung through and across with machinery. Tubes and wires, dirty and their entry-points scarred from infection and poor care, ran across its sides and back like streamers, and instead of eyes, two pieces of metal that resembled old photograph lenses were on each side of its head.

It roared- no, *cried*- in agony as it tossed its head back and forth, knocking a shop's neon sign clear off of its top. It was in pain, it was reacting, and it was out of its element out here, in the cold where no amphibian or reptile should be.

"Got a plan for this one, Al?"

Allison's fingers tapped the steering wheel, "...Working on it."

"Guess that's why your boyfriend told you to stay out of it."

"Dad, come on, he's only been here a *week*-"

"It teleports... *Of course* it teleports...!"
Agent Tower trudged through the snow back towards town, Espio on one side and Omega on the other. "Good lord, what have you government scientists been up to lately...!?"

"I have witnessed this type of power before." Espio informed as he jumped from one branch to another, "The powers of chaos are both revered and feared on our home planet."

"Any idea how something *here* would have gotten that power?"

"Alas, I do not. I am quite unfamiliar with this planet. I only came here on behalf of my client. This was not part of my plan."

Its destruction will be swift once I am in range. Omega announced, **No obstacle will stand before my might!**

"We have to play this cool, Omega. Humans can't get hurt in this."

Humans are fragile and easy crushed. Taking preventative measures to ensure their safety will limit my actions.

"But you're still going to do it."

Provide a good explanation.

"Because I outrank you and I said so."

The robot was quiet for a moment, **...Acceptable, but disappointing.**

The trees broke away and they could see downtown Green Hills just ahead, but sadly, that was also where the beast was. It was trying desperately to move on its own through the streets, car alarms going off as it bumped or even tried to climb over them. At least it was a holiday and most people were in the residential areas- where *it wasn't*- at the moment.

The snow had been plowed away from the streets, allowing the man to increase the speed as he ran down an alleyway to get a closer eye on the creature. He also saw two other people getting out of their car to join them. "Allison, I didn't call you to have you get involved."

"You called me about an animal in need, and as a vet, it's my responsibility to respond."

Agent Tower rolled his eyes, "What do you think caused it to warp here of all places?"

"It's in a pain-induced rage, based on everything I'm seeing. I don't think it's really thinking straight to begin with." He brows furrowed, "As much as I hate to say it, it needs to be put out of its misery. It doesn't deserve to be like this."

"Agreed, but how do we get it out of town where no humans will get involved..."

You are involved. Omega informed. **And you are human.**

Allison looked to the robot, raising a brow. "Friend of yours?"

"Eh... No. Omega, Allison. Allison, Omega. And then that's-"
Tower looked to his right, finding the third member of his brief trio had disappeared. "...Oh for crying out loud. There's a chameleon out here somewhere that might be-"

The giant amphibian then gave another loud shriek, and the humans all covered their ears as it vibrated through the streets. Tower looked up and saw a purple shape gripping tightly to one of the tubes protruding from its side, and appeared to be trying to cut through it with some sort of blade.

The creature twisted to try and reach the smaller cold-blooded creature with its neck, sending a car flying into a shop's front with its tail.

"Watch it!"
The man that had accompanied Allison grabbed both of the youngsters and pulled them back and away from the glass that scattered across the floor. "Good thing I was here."

"We're fine, Dad." Allison complained.

"Ah. Yes." Agent Tower held out a hand in greeting, "Good to meet you, Dr. Riley. Your daughter's spoken highly of your skills."

"Can we continue this *later*!?" Allison argued.

Another roar shook the streets and then Espio yelped as an electrical shock ran across its body and he dropped to the ground with a grunt. He recovered quickly and scrambled away from its stomping foot before disappearing invisible again.

"*Idiot*." Agent Tower muttered.

"Excuse me!?" Espio's voice informed from somewhere to their right, "I happen to be a fully-trained ninja."

"Well, your training needs work."

Allison's phone then rang, and she pulled it out. "Oh boy... Hey, Mads! Erm... Yeah? It's on 32nd and Web right now. About eh... fifteen feet tall at the shoulder?"

"Oh *please* don't get the boys involved in this." Agent Tower muttered.

"Oh, they're coming, Tower." Allison hissed as she covered the speaker. "No. No, it's not a *Venfrelk*, it's a *salamander*- a big one, but still- but it is giving off the same sparkles that the boys do... What? No, no! Don't let *him* get involved, he's *hurt*!... What's *that* supposed to mean?"

Another roar and the salamander's camera eyes shifted attention, and the humans' eyes widened as it growled.

"...Oh no. It sees us. I gotta call you back, Mads."

The Wachowskis tried to ignore the sounds coming from outside- until it sounded much too close for comfort and the windows rattled.

Ozzie fled to safety under the table, whining with his tail tucked close to him. Tom had already started to collect his uniform, prepared to defend his home from whatever threat lay out there. Each roar sent shivers of color down Sonic and Knuckles' backs, panic and concern etched into their brows as they looked out the window.

"It's getting closer, Mom..." Sonic murmured, "How's it going, Tails?"

"Well, I found some references to the number three-nine-seven-seven-two, but nothing involving a monster. Don't want to risk digging too deep, though. We're in enough trouble with the government as it is." Tails bit his lip, "I mean... I could try, but-"

"We need to do something." Knuckles stood up, "I am done waiting for the menace to come to us."

Maddie sighed, "Let me see what I can find out..." She pulled out her phone, typing in a number. "...Hey Allison, it's me."

"What would Miss Allison know about this?"

"You've been hearing those roars, are they closer to you?... You've got eyes on it?"

"Is it a venfrelk!?" Knuckles asked, "I have my doubts, but-"

Maddie shook her head, mouthing *'no'* to the echidna after a moment. "A salamander that's fifteen feet at the shoulder?"

"Good lord!" Mrs. Wachowski exclaimed, "*That's* not fitting under a log...! And in this cold weather-"

"The Prototype."
The boys all looked to Shadow as he stood up, his eyes wide. "I know what it is now! It was a prototype when they made me!"

"...It's got the power too?"

Shadow's brows furrowed, "I have to get out there. Maybe I can help calm it *down*!"

"Shadow, honey. I'm grateful you want to help, but... No, no, he just says that he might be able to calm it down... It what? No! Don't hang up, Allison-"
She pulled the phone down and looked to Tom, "She just said it saw her and then hung up."

Tom was throwing his coat on, "Let's go, boys!"

Knuckles and Sonic were up and moving, but Shadow was stopped by Maddie. "But Miss Maddie-"

"No, you need to let them handle this."

The dark hedgehog crossed his arms, "I might be the only thing left that it recognizes! Maybe I can reason with it!"

"Hon, that roar doesn't sound like something that can be reasoned with, trust me..."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay. Work's been very, very stressful lately and my energy and drive to write has been kaput because of it...

Chapter 9: Dodge and Weave

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Allison didn't move.

The street was a bit of a mess at the moment. Cars knocked aside and onto the sidewalks, their alarms going off in varying speeds and tones. Grooves had been dug into the asphalt as the salamander had dragged itself along, signs and awnings were knocked to the ground, and now, it had turned to look in their direction.

She knew that Jurassic Park wasn't real, and that perhaps standing still wouldn't *actually* keep it from seeing them- it wasn't even a dinosaur anyways- but still, she froze in place. Not from fear, but from her training with wild animals in general. It was hurt, confused, and probably felt threatened, moving towards it wasn't a good move.

Permit me to open fire. Omega begged. **My arsenal begs to be released upon the world.**

"No." Agent Tower whispered, "We need to figure out a strategy first."

I have conducted a strategy. Open fire and let fate decide judgement on its soul.

"If you do not stop that, I *will* find a way to put you right back in whatever cardboard box your assembly set came out of."

The salamander cried out again, its sound vibrating against their chests.

"I know, baby..." Allison cooed softly, "...I know it hurts...!"

She then saw a flash of blue, and saw Sonic appear on the other side of their target. She motioned for him to hold off, and he nodded, though his eyes were wide in shock as he took in the salamander's size and form for the first time.

The salamander then turned its head to look in Sonic's direction, and the hedgehog took a step back as it hissed.

"Uh...N-Nice giant lizard...!" Sonic murmured, "Nice lizard...!"

Hurt.

"Ugh...!"

"Silver? Silver, what is wrong?"

The hedgehog grimaced as he brought his hand to his head. Miss Allison and her father hadn't been gone long, but those remaining in the Riley House were still worried. The roars continued to come from somewhere outside, and Allison had left in such a hurry, it must be a serious situation.

Was it wrong for him and Blaze to remain where they were? Should they have insisted on coming with her like Dr. Riley had?

Blaze and Silver had been sitting at the window, waiting for their guardian's car to come back up into the drive.

Then the word hit Silver's head like a stone, and his attention was on it instead.

"Silver?"
Blaze placed a hand on his shoulder, "What is it?"

"Ugh... It... It was a *voice*-"

Help.

Both of the hedgehog's hands lifted to his temples, rubbing them. "H-Help...Help *who*...?" He whispered.

Mrs. Riley walked over to the pair, "Does your head hurt, Silver? I'm sure Allison has some Ibuprofen in the cabinet-"

"I'm alright, Mrs. Riley." Silver insisted, "I... I don't think medicine will help this."

Blaze leaned closer, her voice barely a whisper. "...Your *telepathy*...?"

Silver nodded. The term *'psychic ability'* covered a lot of ground, but while his telekinesis was his strong suit, he could *also* pick up on other psychic signals, a telepathy far weaker and less-trained than lifting items from the table.

Hurt. Help.

Silver's brows furrowed, *Who are you? Where are you?*

Another roar echoed, but it wasn't through his ears... it was in his head. "It...It's *you*... Blaze, stay here-"

"What? *No*!"
Blaze grasped Silver's arm as he stood up, "Silver, Miss Allison insisted we stay here where it's *safe*."

"I know, but it's the creature. It's... It's calling for *help*."

"Oh..."
The pair turned back towards the couch, where Opal sat swiping downward on her phone

screen, "And I suppose you know this because of some mystical power given to you by the alien gods."

"Opal, be nice." Mrs. Riley scolded.

Silver's brows furrowed, and then put his hands on his hips. "As a matter of fact, yes."

Help.

Silver winced again, "I-I *hear* you...! Ergh... Blaze, I can't just-"

"Fine then." Blaze's hand moved to his, squeezing it tightly. "Then I will come with you."

"No, you should stay here where it's safe. I'd hate to see you get hurt-"

"No more discussion on the matter!"
Her hand gripped his even tighter, and he saw a flicker of pink flash in the corner of her eyes. "*I am coming with you,* Silver*,* and that is final."

"Well, if this is a *family* affair..." Mrs. Riley replied with a smile, "Come on, Opal."

"Excuse me?"

"You want to just sit there all alone while we go on an adventure?"

"Uh... *Yeah*?"

"Fine then." Silver decided, "We must hurry, I do not know how long we have before something happens."

He ran to the coat rack, pulling down his coat and then Blaze's and zipping each other up in their warmth, and then they and Mrs. Riley were heading out the door.

"Mind the ice." Mrs. Riley warned as they reached the vehicle.

Silver sat down in the back seat, strapping the seatbelt over himself and then still rubbing his temples as another roar came through. "H-Hold on... We're coming."

He looked up as the passenger door opened, and gave a mild smirk as he saw Opal climb into the seat. "Change your mind, Miss Opal?"

"Hmph. It'll be boring at the house by myself."

"Right..."

But then, he seemed to sense a change in the cry. It went from desperate pleas, to a focused, single word, as if something had caught its attention.

...Little. Little!

"N-Nice lizard...!"

Sonic had dashed out of the house without much thought other than the fact that Allison might be at risk, and of course he'd taken point in their run for town. His dad was in the truck and Knuckles was running not too far behind, but he got there first- and thus he was the first one that got eyes on the mysterious monster- and the first one that the monster got eyes on.

It was huge! He'd known it was big, but not *that* big! Tubes and wires were strewn all over its body and into its skin like someone who'd fled their hospital room without pulling out the IVs first, and at the entry points and all along the wires was sparking electricity.

And now it was not only looking at him, but hissing and growling.

What was I thinking what was I thinking- Panic tried to swirl in his head, but he didn't move. Not yet. "J-Just take it easy...!"

It turned to face him completely, its tail sending a car flipping over onto the sidewalk. It stomped its foot, sending shudders through the ground. Sonic jumped as the ground shifted under him, and felt a flicker over his own body. He looked up as it seemed to freeze, and then its mouth opened wide in a roar.

It sensed his power, and it seemed to make it mad.

"Oh geez!"

He dodged as it snapped at him, jumping back and his eyes widening as it began to haul itself forward towards him. "No no no no-!"

"Sonic! See if you can lure it out of town!" Agent Tower hollered.

Sonic nodded, "O-Okay, big guy. You want me? Come and get me!"

He turned and started to run, just in time to pass Knuckles.

"Sonic, what are you-"

"It's trying to *eat* me!"

"It-Whoa!"
Knuckles looked back, and then followed his brother's lead of running. "What is the *plan*!?"

"We need to get it away from people and buildings-"

Both gasped as it was suddenly in front of them in a flash of green.

"Might be harder than you think...!" Knuckles pounded his fists together, "We will have to stand and fight!"

"Knuckles, wait!" Sonic warned, but the echidna didn't not always think with his head. The red bruiser rushed forward, leaping into the air and preparing to punch it in the jaw- only for

it to twist its head and as Knuckles' moved past it, his leg was snagged in its mouth. "Knuckles!"

"Whoa-aaaah!" Knuckles swung back and forth, "Unhand-erm, *unmouth* me!"

"Hold on, Bro! I'm coming!"

Sonic moved forward, but then it disappeared again. "No, no! Knuckles!"

He looked around their surroundings, listening, looking for the beast, but it had vanished. It could have taken the echidna anywhere, done anything with him.

And then it was back. But Knuckles was not with it, or at least... Not visibly.

"I swear, if you ate my brother you've got another thing coming!"

The lizard responded by roaring again and then moving after him with an open mouth again. He started to run again. He saw his dad approaching in the truck, heard him call his name, and then-

-*Thunk!*

He made the mistake of not looking ahead, and found himself smashing straight into a fence. He bounced off of it and curled up on instinct to roll off the hit, but he rolled right back towards the salamander. He looked up in a mild daze and major fear as it loomed over him with an open mouth, before someone grabbed his arm and yanked him out of the way. "Ye-Ah!"

His rescuer suddenly became visible, a lizard from his world that was not dressed for the elements. "T-Thanks...!" He gasped.

"Well, I don't exactly get *paid* if you're *dead*."

"Am I supposed to know what that means? Gyah!"
They jumped aside as the salamander came after them again, and Sonic frowned as it seemed to ignore the lizard and still pursue him. "Why is it only want *me*!?"

"Still trying to figure that out."

"Great! Get back to me when you figure that out! *As soon as possible* would be nice!"

Sonic was being chased, Knuckles was... Somewhere where Sonic couldn't tell if he was okay or not, and he had no idea how to stop this thing from tearing up the town.

He circled back, heading to try and reconvene with the adults. They needed a plan, they needed to work together-

It blocked him off again. It stood between him and his father's truck, and then he saw its tail headed straight for an incoming vehicle.

And Sonic had seen what that tail could do to cars. "*DAD! Look out!*"

Tom was braced for the impact, but then the tail hit something else- something that formed out of seemingly nowhere, glowed blue, and made a warbling sound as the tree-trunk of a tail made contact.

"Silver...?"

He looked over and saw the white hedgehog running down the sidewalk with Blaze close behind. "Sonic! Duck!"

Sonic ducked, avoiding the salamander's jaws snapping at him again. "Great! A powerhouse to take this thing down!"

"I've got an idea! Go *that* way! Everyone else back off!"
Silver pointed down the street, and Sonic nodded, though not sure exactly why going a certain way would help. Silver ran the opposite direction, and the rampaging beast stopped. It stopped chasing, standing in the middle of the road, looking back and forth between them, as if not sure which to go after first.

"How is this working?" Sonic mumbled, "Why isn't it attacking us...? Just pick one..."

Its head tossed back and forth, and then it looked to the humans, snarling and roaring angrily, as if they had something to do with it.

"I knew it!" Silver announced, "It's trying to keep us away from everyone else."

"But why?"

"Because it's trying to *protect* us!"

"Oh yeah? Well it did a fine job of protecting-"
Sonic looked over as he saw a flash of red, and then Knuckles came to a stop beside him, panting for breath. "Knuckles! you didn't get eaten!"

"Of course not...!" Knuckles growled, holding up his fists once more. "The beast teleported away, dropped me in the forest, and then was gone again."

"See?" Silver pointed, "It was trying to keep him away from danger by any means necessary!"

Sonic jumped back as there was then a flash of gold, and the third hedgehog appeared in front of him, arms spread out as if to guard him. "Shadow-"

"Stop! Stop...!" He begged, looking the creature in the eye. "I don't know how much you can understand me, but *I* understand *you*! You were taken from your home, they hurt you, tried to make you into something you were never meant to be! You're *hurting*, and you just want to *stop* hurting!"
He adjusted his hands to his chest, "I know because they did the same thing to *me*! I lost my home, my family, my future! I want to help you get yours back!"

Sonic winced as Knuckles carefully grasped his arm and pulled him up to his feet. "You think he's actually getting through to it?"

"Well, it is no longer rampaging through town..." Knuckles mumbled.

Shadow bent down slowly, "Please... They will come here looking for you... Let me help you get somewhere safe."

"That's a hard thing to promise, Shadz." Sonic remarked, "I don't think there's anywhere on this planet that humans won't try to hurt or use it as a weapon."

I can use it for target practice!
The trio looked where a large robot stood beside Allison, Agent Tower, and Allison's father, a mechanical fist raised in the air. **If not for the puny human outranking me!**

"That's it, Omega. I am ordering you to not speak for the remainder of the day." Agent Tower grumbled.

"One more person to ask." Sonic hummed, getting a nod from Knuckles as he seemed to have the same idea. "Follow me, guys! We need it to follow us."

The blue hedgehog then took off down the streets, Silver following and Shadow yelping as Knuckles scooped him up into his arms and raced after them.

There was a roar from behind, and then Sonic heard it chasing after them into the trees.

"Where are we going!?" Shadow asked.

"Back to the lake! This time, we're *getting* that word with Kaia..."

Chapter End Notes

Been a while (almost three months, oops) but I'm finally getting some writing energy and inspiration back in my bones!

Will Kaia be able to help the boys with their giant, amphibian problem? Stay tuned-

Chapter 10: Rescue, Rehabilitate, Release

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Why are you here, Shadow? Our mother gave you specific instructions to remain in the safety of our home!"

"I...I *had* to come."

Shadow wished he had a reasonable answer to Knuckles' question, but his biggest drive had been this sudden and unacceptable knowledge that somehow, he *needed* to be there with the others. This creature was in pain, it was lost, and he might be the only person that might understand what it was going through.

Perhaps it was seeing Sonic and Knuckles in action during a training exercise outside in the backyard, maybe it was his memory of how easily Silver had destroyed that robot without even really thinking about it. They were powerful, and they weren't afraid to use their powers to get stuff done, even if it meant hurting who or what was threatening their home and families.

Shadow couldn't let them hurt it, he just *couldn't*. He'd pop in, help them calm it down, and then be back before anyone knew it!... Well, excluding Rouge. He'd told *her* where he was going, and promised he'd be back for her. He knew how she felt about people leaving and not coming back.

"That is not a suitable response, but it can wait." Knuckles replied, "Silver, how did you know that the beast was trying to keep us away from the humans?"

"I have limited telepathy...!" Silver panted, "I could hear its thoughts...! At first, it was calling for help because it was hurt, but then it started calling out about protecting the *'Littles!'* I think those machines over its eyes can detect Chaos energy, and it considers us to be little versions of itself!"

"Well, that would explain why it was ignoring that lizard and only going after me...!" Sonic huffed, "Is it still- Oh gosh!" He dared look back and then picked up the pace, "Yup, it's still after us!"

The giant beast was doing its best to trudge through the snow and trees after them, but its size and short flipper-like legs made it harder, so instead, it was just warping itself from place to place where it would fit between the trees.

Shadow looked back to the beast, watching it huff and struggle to pursue them. But why? They had gotten a fair distance from the humans now, was it really that persistent to catch up to them...?

Then he found another vision flash before his eyes: He was still being carried, looking back over the shoulder of another as they ran through trees. Fire and shouts came from behind, threats he didn't understand. But who were they? What did they want? Why were they running from them?

"Shadow!"
Shadow snapped back into his true surroundings, finding himself slipping in Knuckles' grasp. "Do not let go of me again."

"R-Right! *Sorry*...!"
Shadow's ears folded back, "Do you think this water goddess will be able to help us?"

"Kaia is the creator of the Chaos Emeralds, powerful artifacts that together enable the user to create anything from imagination. She is ancient herself, surely she knows something that will aid us."

"I'll take that as *'I don't know, but I hope so.'*"

"Indeed. Hold on!"

Shadow looked ahead of them again as the lake came into view, and then tightened his grip on the echidna's shoulders as they ran out onto the icy surface. He slipped a little, but did a lot better at maintaining his balance on the surface than Sonic had when they were fleeing Stone- though Shadow had also been *squirming* to get away when *Sonic* was carrying him.

They paused in the center, looking out as the salamander appeared on the edge of the shore, roaring and looking like it was trying to decide whether or not to follow them.

"Okay, we got a second." Sonic bent down and placed his hands on the ice, "Kaia? Kaia, we need your help!"

"Oh gee, didn't think that part out very well, *did* you?" Silver groaned.

"Well, why don't you use your *telepathy* and call her *that way*!?"

"I don't have that much control over it yet!"

Shadow shook his head, "You guys are great at making up plans without thinking them over, aren't you...?" He groaned, and then heard the ice crack and looked up- the salamander was trying to make its way out onto the frozen surface. "Here he comes...!"

Sonic's eyes widened, and he began rapidly knocking on the surface of the ice. "Kaia Kaia Kaia Kaia-"

All at once, the ice split open between them and the approaching beast, and a pair of arms- composed of water- broke out and then hauled a head, shoulders and torso out.

"Ah, there you are!" Sonic announced.

Kaia looked to the beast, and then to the boys. "How did this happen? I haven't been asleep *that* long!"

"*We* didn't do it!" Sonic complained, "It was the human government like, fifty years ago!"

Shadow's eyes were wide; he knew her voice from somewhere... But *where*?

"Oh yeah? *Why*?"

"Why does the human government do anything that benefits nature?" Knuckles complained.

"Right, so we need you to turn it back to normal!"

Kaia blinked, "You need me to *what*?"

"You know, use your powers to drain out the chaos energy and turn it back into a regular salamander!"

"...Sonic-"
The hedgehogs stepped back as the giant creature approached, but with a fluid motion Kaia had her arms wrapped around it's torso, holding it back and also in place as it struggled. Green flashes pulsed from it and it roared, but it seemed to be relaxing a bit in her grasp as she spoke softly to it. "Easy, baby boy, easy... You're okay... Sonic, I don't think you fully understand how my powers *work*."

Knuckles bent down, "Kaia, pardon our confusion, but as the goddess who forged the Chaos Emeralds, are you not able to access the same power as they? To change reality to your whim?"

"Well, if I had all seven of them and was at full-power, then *yes*! But as of now, I've only got one of them."

She tilted her head, allowing them to see a small circlet around her brow that was currently adorned with one, small, white, glowing stone- the very emerald Shadow had thrown into the lake just weeks ago. She gave him a light smile, did she know it had been him to return it to her?

She then looked back to the squirming amphibian, "You poor thing... What did they *do* to you...?"

"Is there anything you can do to help them, then?" Silver asked, "It's desperate to keep us from our human guardians as it deems them a threat, and if GUN finds it again, they will either destroy it or continue their experiments on it."

"It's *suffering*, Goddess Kaia." Shadow begged, "We just want it to not be in agony anymore..."

Kaia sighed, "...I can heal it, but much of the damage is too extensive for me to reverse at my current level of power. It will no longer be in pain, but there is still the problem of its size, power, and keeping it out of the humans' grasp."

Sonic shook his head, "There's nowhere on Earth that it could hide. It's too big and humans with their smartphones are everywhere. Anywhere it might try to go, they'd find it."

Silver rubbed his chin, "What about that other planet you were going to flee to, Sonic? If Robotnik survived there, then it must have oxygen-rich atmosphere and enough food and water."

"Yeah... Yeah! And there's no intelligent life there, so nobody could hunt him!"

Shadow looked to the goddess, "Please... They don't deserve all of this."

"No... They do not."
Her voice as she comforted the giant amphibian, the gentle, caring tone- it was what told Shadow where he knew her from. The voice that had comforted him in the woods days ago, amongst the snow. The one that had told him she would hide him from the agents' sight... It had been *her*.

Shadow looked away as both Kaia and the wounded animal began to glow, but the energy that was coming off of them both made his quills flare just a bit. It was like a wave washing over his frame, and soothing all of the aches and pains in his limbs... Mostly.

It seemed like only a moment, but then it faded, and he looked back.

She still grasped the salamander carefully, but it had changed. The old, damaged machinery that had been woven through its body was gone, though where it had been remained scarred. Its camera eyes remained, the shutters opening and closing like lids blinking as it calmed even further. Roars had become low, vibrating moans and chuffs.

"Yes, great beast." Knuckles remarked with a bow, "You have been freed from your bonds. Now we shall send you where no one will harm you again."

"Geez, it's amazing what not being in constant pain can do to a guy's attitude!" Sonic announced, "Now, gimme a second to think about where we're going... Got it."
He pulled a ring out of his satchel, tossing it up a few times before then throwing it out ahead of him. It erupted into color, growing in size and the center of the ring shifting until it formed a view of the wide expanse of mushrooms ahead.

"Whoa..." Shadow whispered, "Where did you *get* those?"

"They're used by a lot of aliens in space for travel," Sonic remarked, "My... My guardian Longclaw gave me some when I had to leave my home planet to escape hunters."

Kaia sighed, "It seems we *all* had someone to run from..."

Shadow's brows furrowed, his mind going back to the flashbacks he'd been having lately of being little and running from something... Did that have something to do with it? Had he been hunted at some point before?

"Alright, big guy." Sonic gestured to the portal, "Ring won't stick around forever!"

"Why don't you show him around?" Kaia asked with a smile.

"What?"
The goddess then responded by releasing her grip on the salamander, and Sonic's eyes widened as it gave a grunt and then began to scramble on the ice towards him. "YIKES! *KAIA!*"

Knuckles chuckled as he watched his younger brother leap through the ring and the mighty beast follow, gaining speed once it had solid soil under its feet and flippers. "I suppose that is fitting. We did wake you from slumber without knowing if you could aid us."

"Right. Don't do that again."

Shadow gasped as the ring then began to shrink, rapidly reducing their view of Sonic ducking and dodging the salamander's feet. "Sonic-"

The blue hedgehog then became a blur, flying closer and then diving through the ring just in time for it to vanish and the creature's roar to fade away. He skidded and slid on the ice, nearly plowing into Silver if not for the gray hedgehog hovering up and out of the way. His sliding finally ended as he reached the edge of the ice, crashing into a drift of snow.

"Oof!... That deserves a medal!" He announced as he sat up and shook snow from his quills, "Sign me up for the next olympics!"

"You'd never make the podium." Knuckles replied flatly.

Silver rolled his eyes, and then paused. "...Though speaking of 'constant pain'... *Shadow*."

Shadow's brows raised, and he looked to Kaia. "Right.... Uh, I'm sure you'd like to go back to rest, and I don't want to ask too much of you, but-"

"Right!" Sonic wrapped an arm around the black hedgehog's shoulders, "He's got shrapnel in his leg that shouldn't be there. Think you could do him a favor? My mom wants to *amputate* if we don't do something."

"I know you said you can't heal completely right now, but please..."

Kaia sighed, but her lips were turned up in a smile. "...I guess since we're already here..."

Shadow smiled back, "Thank you..."

"It's been too long..."

Rouge sat by the door, looking out into the darkening surroundings. Shadow had left to help the others without barely a word, just taking her hand tightly and saying "I *will* come back..."

The older Wachowski couple had told her it would be fine. They'd seen their grandsons in action, there was nothing to worry about. Maddie was both furious and worried that Shadow

had disobeyed and left the house after she told him not to, and was by the window, watching in the same way that Rouge was.

She saw headlights turn into the drive, and the Wachowski's truck bounced over the packed snow into the yard and then came to a stop. Ozzie started barking, Obsidian- who had been playing with his toys on the living room floor- was alerted by the dog and got up onto his toddling feet to waddle towards the door.

Rouge watched through the haze. The sheriff got out of the truck, then the fox... and then she saw one echidna, two hedgehogs, and one more figure hop out of the back and make their way towards the front porch.

"Oh thank the gods." Rouge hissed, opening the door. "Shadow, you idiot-"

"Hey hey hey, give the guy a break! We did him a favor just now!" Sonic announced.

"Oh really...?" Rouge crossed her arms, "How is chasing after a giant lizard-"

"*Amphibian*." Tails corrected.

"...*Amphibian*... doing a crippled hedgehog a favor?"

Sonic had been supporting Shadow as they made their way up the steps, but as Sonic let go, Rouge watched Shadow take a solid, unassisted step on his bad leg. Though still wincing a bit, he could put weight on it, he could walk on it!

"Shadow...!" Maddie's lips turned up into a wide, excited smile. "You can walk!"

"Well, mostly." Shadow lifted his bad foot and wiggled it back and forth, "Kaia was able to use her powers to remove the shrapnel, at least. It still hurts, but..." He grinned, "I can walk again...!"

"HA HA!"
Rouge wrapped her arms around his neck, "You still scared the crap out of me."

"Hey, I told you I'd be *back*..."

"What about the salamander?" Maddie asked.

Tom grinned, "Sonic says he's been sent to the Mushroom Planet where nobody can bother him... Hey," He turned towards the porch, "You gonna come in where it's warm or not, Ninja-Boy?"

Rouge raised a brow, and saw the other figure stumble his way into the house. A chameleon from their planet, his limbs stiff and graying in color.

Maddie sighed, "Another house guest, Tom?"

"O-Only for the night." The chameleon announced firmly, "I will be returning home in the morning. I have work to get back to..."

"Work, huh...? Alright..."

"Sounds like we've had an eventful day." Grandma Maggie announced, "Time to wind down and get ready for bed."

"Bed... That sounds *lovely*." Shadow remarked with a smile.

Chapter End Notes

If all seven Chaos Emeralds can bring Sonic back from the dead in 06, I think one of them could allow its creator to heal some non-lethal wounds...

Chapter 11: Dreams of Being Something More

"M-Maria!"
Shadow gasped as he was dragged behind the teenage girl down the corridors of the Ark. He hadn't seen this kind of energy and drive in her in a long time, and it worried him. "S-Slow down! My legs aren't as *long* as yours!"

"Come on, Shadow. You can do it!"

"S-Sorry...! It's hard to build up stamina when you're only allowed in five different rooms...!"

Red lights shone down on the hallways as the pair ran, alarms blaring in Shadow's ears. They'd begun a few minutes ago, but they were not the normal emergency lights and alarms. Nobody had started a fire in the laboratory trying to invent a new type of plastic this time... This was something else, and Shadow didn't like it.

He gripped Maria's hand tighter as she tugged him along, watching her close doors behind them as they moved, keeping something, or perhaps *someone*, at a distance from them.

"What is going on!? Why are we *running*!?"

"The hull's been breached. We're going down!"

"The station's gonna crash!?"

"Not unless someone turns off the orbital stabilizer. *Pray to God* that doesn't happen...!"

She finally stopped, putting a hand to her chest as she rested against the wall.

"Maria, are you-"

"F-Fine...!" She gave him a smile, "Whew...! You were saying about low stamina...?"

In their running, Shadow hadn't been paying much attention to *where* exactly they were going, only that it was further than he was used to going. He looked up at the wall behind her as she stood up straight again, his eyes widening. "Sector 9... Mar, we're not supposed to *be* down here."

"This isn't a normal circumstance, Shadow. And I have a feeling it never will be again..."
She pressed a series of buttons on the pad, and the wall opened, revealing a massive, circular room.

"Okay. Answers, Mar. *Now*."

"The station's been compromised... Soldiers are here."

"What do they want?"

"Lots of things... but you're one of them."

"What? *Why*?" Shadow grasped his quills in his hands, "Did I do something horrible in my sleep...!?"

"No such luck."
Maria limped over to a console, "You're not like them, and some people don't *like* that for some reason... I gotta get you out of here."

"What!? No! No way, no how!" Shadow grasped her hand, "I'm supposed to *protect you*, remember? Professor Robotnik said-"

"Shadow, you're just a *kid*!"
Maria bent down, gripping his shoulder. "Don't think about what Grandpa said, all that garbage about you being the Ultimate Lifeform and the savior of the world. That's too much to put on the shoulders of one kid who's still losing his *baby teeth*."

Shadow moved his tongue over his teeth as she spoke, feeling one wiggle back and forth. "But if I'm not supposed to help everyone, then what am I supposed to *do*!?"

Maria smiled, "You don't need to be somebody for everybody, Shadow, you just need to make everybody you meet feel like a somebody. You get what I'm saying?"
They both looked as they heard a loud thud, and then the faint sounds of gunfire. Maria gripped his shoulder tighter, "Be good, okay? Can you be *good* for me? Can you *trust* me?"

Shadow swallowed, "...To the Earth and back. But what about *you*? If they find out you helped me escape-"

"I'll be fine."

That was a lie. Shadow knew that, but he also knew his big sister was as stubborn as a stripped screw. She wasn't coming out of this decision easily, if at all.

"You'll *die*, Maria."

"Maybe, but I think we all knew that was coming..." She pressed her head against his, her blonde bangs brushing against his red fur. "...I've felt it coming... I'm going to go soon either way... Grandpa *tried*, but... It is how it is."

"Maria... If there is *anything* I could do to stop it-"

"If I'm gonna go out, it's not by hiding. I wanna go out knowing I did the right thing. I've accepted it, but I'm not going to let them ruin your life because *Grandpa* won't accept it." She stood up and pointed to the center of the room, "Now go stand in that circle over there. I'll set the pod."

Shadow hugged her tightly, and then back up, standing in the center of the circle where she'd pointed. "So what, does the pod just-"
He yelped as suddenly the ceiling above him slammed down, a clear cylinder crashing at high speed into the floor and forming a giant tube around him. "Jeeee-hoshaphat!" He gasped.

Maria smiled just a hint, tapping a few buttons on the console.

"I *hate this*...!" Shadow whimpered, His voice cracking. "...I'm *scared*! I-I've never been on the surface! What if I can't-"

"Don't worry about the *'What-Ifs'*. Trust me, remember? To Earth and back."

Shadow pressed his hands against the glass, "...To the Earth and back...!" Tears spilled down his cheeks, his legs shaking under him.

Then the door blew open. Maria gasped, leaning over the console as debris flew into the room. A soldier stepped in through the smoke and dust, aiming the weapon at Shadow, and then at Maria as she sat up straight again. "Just a girl...! Step away from that console!"

Maria made direct eye contact as she wrapped her fingers around the large lever.

"No! Don't you *dare*! Trust me, it's not worth your life!"

"Don't *hurt* her!" Shadow begged, "*Please*, *please* don't hurt her!"

"You want *Project Shadow?* You'll find it *downstairs*... I'm just helping my *little brother* get away from you sickos."

"*Hands off that lever*!"

Maria gave Shadow a firm look, and then lifted her middle finger to the man with one hand and yanked on the lever with the other.

Shadow felt the pod shift, but then there was a loud bang, and he screamed as his leg shot out pain he'd never experienced. He heard Maria shriek his name, but then the pod dropped. New alarms were going off as the tube began to tumble. Shadow was spinning, his leg was screaming, and he'd just lost everything, everyone he'd known.

He was going to fall, he was going to crash... He was going to be alone.

Sonic was up and down the stairs before Shadow had finished screaming.

"Shadow!?"
He turned the corner to look in the living room, finding Rouge already moving from her place on the couch towards the pile of pillows and blankets that were presently flickering with golden sparks. "Shadow, are you okay?"

"I-I..." Shadow placed his face in his palms, his breaths hard but slowing. "...Yeah... Yeah, I just... *Nightmare*... Sorry, guys..."

Sonic frowned, looking up as he heard his parents' door open and then both of them appearing behind him. "We're okay."

"You sure, baby?" Maddie murmured as she walked over to the trembling hedgehog, "That sounded like quite the bad dream."

"I...Yeah..."
Shadow sniffled, wiping his nose with the backside of his glove. "...More of a memory, I guess... My sister... She was trying to save me... To keep me away from the soldiers."

Rouge placed a hand on his shoulder, "You're remembering more..."

"Yeah... Guess Kaia healed more than just my leg."

Movement on the back of the couch made them turn as Espio slowly came back out of invisibility, "It is fortunate it was just a nightmare," He replied, "I was worried it was The Order breaking in."

"The Order?" Sonic asked, "What's that?"

Espio's expression became serious, though there was a look to his gaze that suggested he hadn't meant to say anything. It was too late now. "...The Order of Order is a terrorist group, a cult that comes from our home planet and seeks to destroy all that draw power from the energies of Chaos."

"Mmm, I remember..."
Knuckles' deep, solemn voice spoke from behind them as he and Tails also joined the group standing in the living room. "My father spoke of them... Killing children before their parents, parents before their children... He once told me that he feared they would come for *me*... but they never did."

"Of course not." Sonic remarked, "Who'd wanna tangle with a bunch of echidnas?"

His head circled back to just a few short days before. His wondering about his birth family, his outburst about not knowing why they left him with Longclaw instead of keeping him. He had this power of chaos... Was that why he wound up with Longclaw? Had his family been attacked by this group and Longclaw took him in?

"Something has to be *done*."
They looked back to Shadow, his brows furrowed. "People being hurt for something out of their control... They didn't ask to have these powers, it's not their fault."

"Gee, sounds like someone *else* we know." Rouge teased, but Shadow's expression changed.

"Right... *Right*."
He winced as he stood up, "I chose to be good, to *do* good, and this is exactly the kind of thing I could help with."

"Whoa hey," Tom replied, "I like the enthusiasm, but you only just got back on your feet, and it's the middle of the night."

"Of course, I'm not saying right this minute, but..."

"How about we continue this discussion in the morning, huh?" Maddie asked, putting a hand on his shoulder. "It's definitely not a 2 AM kind of talk."

"Right... Okay... I'll think it over."

"Good idea."

"Mama...?"
They all looked down, the parents' eyes wide as they saw Obsidian waddling out of their room, Ducky tucked under one arm. "Seepy..."

"What... Did you figure out how to climb out of your bed, little man?" Tom asked, scooping the tiny hedgehog up in his arms. "We're gonna have to watch out for that-"

Sonic, Tails, and Knuckles all looked to one another. They knew he hadn't climbed out of bed, not traditionally, anyway.

Do we tell them? Sonic's eyes asked.

The others shook their heads slightly. For now, the secret would remain that... *Their* secret.

This was unacceptable. Completely unacceptable.

Omega marched back and forth in the snow, his hydraulics whirring and his metal joints creaking as he paced. His mission had been a failure, he had not achieved the goal of destroying the threat to the region; instead, he'd been helpless to stop the tiny, sparkling organics from luring the beast off into the woods. Mere minutes later, the blue one returned, informing them that they'd *'handled it.'*

He could have *easily* taken it down on his own, easily sent it to its fate, but he was restricted by human orders- he hated that these weak, living piles of calcium wrapped in flesh were able to command his superior, titanium frame and unrivaled arsenal of weapons and firepower. Why did his processor accept their authority so easily, while also fighting it at the same time? Compelled to obey, though not liking it.

Why did he not like it? How did he possess such an emotional spectrum? Did it really affect his performance? Was it intentional, or perhaps simply a glitch in his programming?

He'd made his own orders to follow the salamander through the woods... Why couldn't he make the decision to not follow someone else's orders?

These were the thoughts that ran through his processor- or perhaps *not* thoughts, as robots were not designed to think so much as follow specific logic routines programed into their circuits.

No, this *was* thinking. Forming his own processes and expanding on others preexisting. He was learning... *Adapting*.

And now one of those new processes was insistent on him leaving the confines of the town and following the might beast's path. He needed to make sure it was gone, he wanted to know how they'd 'handled it', and if that method was suitable.

Agent Tower had only informed him to "stay out of trouble," Not to remain in the confines of town.

The pacing broke free of a repetitive state, his feet moving one in front of the other, further and further from the buildings and closer to the woods.

Street lights became the moon shining overhead, street signs to tree trunks, barking of dogs to just the soft crunching of snow under his feet.

The trail led up, up, and then down again, following long, wide streaks of snow shoved aside. It led all the way to the edge of a lake, and the surface of the ice lay cracked and uneven from a great weight passing over it, all the way to a large hole several hundred feet into the lake's surface that was still slowly freezing over.

They had lured it into the lake's depths? It appeared so, but it was also a limited method. While the beast would be immobilized from the cold water below, it would wake come spring and rise to wreak havoc once more. Omega did not want to wait that long to make sure the mission was finished.

His foot took a step out onto the ice-

Crack!

He paused as the ice cracked under his weight. Odd, the beast was larger and certainly heavier than he...

The ice continued to crack even as he pulled his foot back, spreading out and then a few pieces of ice popping free and lifting up as something began to emerge. Omega prepared his arsenal to fire, seeing a pair of glowing green eyes within the dark, shadowy water. **Surface and you will face death.**

My my... A trigger-happy little automaton, aren't you?

Laugh at my firepower and I will laugh over your corpse.

Hmm... Very well. You are awfully emotive for a traditional build. Tell me, what powers you?

Omega paused, he hadn't really thought about it. **...An experimental engine.**

Which is powered by...?

...An experimental energy source. Found by my maker.

Interesting... I have a task for you, E-Series 123-Omega.

I do not take orders from glowing eyes in lakes.

It comes with the opportunity to destroy enemies...

The robot was quiet for a moment, and then leaned a little closer to the surface of the water. **...I am not agreeing to take orders from you, but for the sake of politeness... Let's say I *am listening-***

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!